Postwar to Postmemory: Okinawan Identity in the Works of Teruya Yūken and Sakata Kiyoko

by

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A thesis accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in History of Art and Architecture

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Spring 2026

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Postwar to Postmemory: Okinawan Identity in the Works of Teruya Yūken and Sakata Kiyoko

Featuring select works by two Okinawan artists born after 1972, when the islands reverted to Japanese control, this thesis argues that post-Reversion Okinawans articulate a clear sense of Okinawan identity amid the eclipsing layers of colonialism by engaging with postmemory mechanisms to recollect memories they did not experience themselves. Okinawa was marked by successive colonial ruptures such as Japan's annexation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom in 1879, the Battle of Okinawa in 1945, the subsequent American occupation, and the reversion of the islands back under Japan's control in 1972.

Teruya Yūken (b. 1973), an Okinawan-born artist who trained and now works abroad, and Sakata Kiyoko (b. 1972), a mainland Japanese artist from Niigata who trained and now works in Okinawa, both belong to the "post-Reversion" generation that struggles to establish a compelling Okinawa indigenous identity. Through *結い, YOU-I* (2002) and *It's about me/it's about you* (2012-2015), Teruya reclaims bingata textile practices from the Japanese mingei movement and intervenes in public archives through extraction, disavowing Japanese myths of homogeneity, putting Okinawa on a global stage and in solidarity with other indigenous movements. In contrast, Sakata's works *About Opposite Shores* (2016) and *Remain – Niigata, Okinawa* (2002) imaginatively project Zainichi Korean subjectivities into both personal and Okinawan contexts, destabilizing the memory traces embedded in family portraits. By analyzing postmemory structures in the post-Reversion context, this thesis repositions the discourse on

Okinawan visual culture, establishing continuity between the disrupted past and contemporary Okinawan communities both locally and globally.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by the Mr./Mrs. Eric G. Clarke Graduate Scholarship in Asian Art, which enabled me to conduct fieldwork in Okinawa. I am deeply appreciative of Sakata Kiyoko 阪田清子 for her time, openness in conversation, and for providing access to her work. I am also grateful to curator Ōshiro Sayuri 大城さゆり at the Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum, as well as to their museum team, for their generous assistance during my site visit.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my primary advisor, Dr. Akiko Walley, for her patient guidance and constructive feedback. Her enthusiasm for my research topic and her dedication to scholarship provided an inspiring environment for research, writing, and teaching. My sincere thanks also go to Dr. Rachel DiNitto and Dr. Victoria Ehrlich for their expert insights and valuable feedback. This thesis would not have been possible without their support. I am grateful to the Department of History of Art and Architecture for providing institutional support through generous funding and a dedicated network of faculty and graduate colleagues who helped the research process at every phase.

Last, but not least, I am endlessly thankful for my parents, my partner Jean-Luc, and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Cazalis, for their unwavering support, encouragement, and patience throughout this process.

Dedicated to my beloved grandparents.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary national and international textbooks on Japanese history frequently identify the year 1868, with fall of the feudal Samurai regime, the restoration of centralized power to Emperor Meiji, and the opening of Japan's borders, collectively known as the Meiji Period, as the origins of modern Japan. This new age was a paradigm shift that opened Japan's renewed geopolitical relationship with the West.[1] In constructing its modern identity, Japan closely adopted various Euro-American models to enhance its position both within Asia and among Western nations. These comprehensive reforms resulted in a highly literate population, monetized economy and an increasingly industrialized society.[2] The dramatic recreation of the nation, as well as its successful resistance of the wave of Western colonization that engulfed much of Asia, is still cited nostalgically as a success story, especially in contrast to Japan's catastrophic defeat in WWII in 1945, following the traumatic atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

However, this widely celebrated narrative is not the whole story. In fact, the decolonial—and closely related de-imperial—turn across higher education also reached scholarship on Japan. Recent scholarship across disciplines such as East Asian politics, culture, and economics has revealed the enduring influence of Japan's colonial past on its modernization. This legacy continues to shape contemporary politics, diplomatic relations, and societal challenges. This thesis examines the legacy of Meiji Japan in the post-1972 context, which can be traced back to the annexation of the autonomous Kingdom of Ryūkyū as the nation's forty-seventh prefecture in 1879, a move intended to shield the remainder of Japanese territory and other Asian colonies

[1] Marius B. Jansen and Gilbert Rozman, eds. *Japan in Transition: From Tokugawa to Meiji* (Princeton University Press, 1986), 10.
[2] Milton Walter Meyer, *Japan: A Concise History*, 4th ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 150.

from foreign intervention. It further analyzes Japan's subsequent colonial administration of Okinawa Prefecture, which was strategically exploited and negotiated during World War II.

More specifically, this thesis focuses not just on the actual traumatic events themselves that dictate the present political and economic predicaments of the Okinawa prefecture today, such as the eradication of Ryūkyū sovereignty in 1879, the brutal battle of Okinawa between the US and Japanese forces at the end of World War II that killed nearly 100,000 Okinawan civilians in a matter of three months, the US occupation of Okinawa and the islands eventual reversion to Japan in 1972. Rather, it examines works by two contemporary artists, Teruya Yūken (照屋勇賢; b. 1973) and Sakata Kiyoko (阪田清子; b. 1972), who were born after the 1972 Okinawa reversion, thus have no personal experience or memory of World War II or its aftermath, but search their own ties to Okinawa and its history and integrate them into their expressions, nevertheless. Teruya and Sakata grew up in the post-Reversion age of continuous political tension between the Okinawa prefectural residents and the Japanese national government on the mainland and of predominantly the mainlanders over Okinawa's disproportionate burden of hosting the US military and its negative ramifications to the islands' life and environment.

A close analysis of Teruya and Sakata's works provide a unique perspective into the post-Reversion generation's struggles to find their identity and integrity through the traumatic memories of not their making. In three chapters, I demonstrate that Teruya and Sakata's career and their works encapsulate two different approaches to what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory." In contrast to approaches that emphasize the process of memory formation, Hirsch's concept of postmemory addresses subsequent generations who lack direct experiences

of past events, a phenomenon she terms "traumatic transfer."[3] Hirsch does not present postmemory as a mere alternative to memory making but rather conceptualizes it as an affective tool. Hirsch uses Art Spiegelman's 1972 three-page "The First Maus" as her case study. In her analysis of how the artist imagines his father's experience in Auschwitz through inserting scenes of Margaret Bourke-White's renowned photographs into a family album, Hirsch underscores the significance of bridging personal and public archives or memories.[4] Within this synaptic space, a structure of transmission emerges, enabling participants to engage with the generative function of postmemory.

Teruya, born in Haebaru on Okinawa Island, had direct experience with the tensions between Okinawans and both Japanese possession and American military occupation. He received his formal training in Tokyo before establishing an international practice in Berlin. He bridges his personal memory of Okinawa with the region's public archives in the socio-political realities of post-Reversion Okinawa by highlighting the intricate colonial relationships among Okinawa, Japan, and the United States.[5] Conversely, Sakata is from mainland Niigata. Her discovery of Daiku Tetsuhiro's 大工哲弘 (1948) "Return Okinawa" (*Okinawa o kaese* 沖縄を返せ), at a CD shop left her perplexed and curious about the song's liberation message, inspiring her to formally train and base her practice in Okinawa. Her works interweaves her personal experiences in encountering Okinawa with poetic testimonies of other colonized subjects and anonymous family photos. While their artistic trajectories reflect contrasting orientations, they

[3] Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 108, https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-019.
[4] Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 113.
[5] There is a distinction between Okinawa Island (沖縄本島) and Okinawa Prefecture, which encompasses several smaller islands. This paper uses the term "Okinawa" to refer to the main Okinawa Island alone.

converge in their exploration of geography and local materials as conduits for examining themes of Okinawa localities, memory and identity, revealing the complex interplay between place and personal narrative in their practices. Teruya and Sakata embody the "traumatic transfer" from the wartime and immediate postwar baby-boomer generations to their post-Reversion offsprings in their choice of "public archives and memories" and their modes of engagement. The colonial interventions of forced assimilation, mass war casualties, and land destruction dismantled and obscured a unified contemporary Okinawan identity. This disjointedness is further complicated by the global Ryūkyū diasporas that were first created from economic hardship experienced during Meiji-period Japan. The personal artistic journey of Teruya, as an Okinawan artist operating transnationally, and of Sakata, a mainland-born artist who migrates to and is professionally embedded within Okinawa, manifest in their works as a complex entanglement of past and present issues of migration, memory, and identity formation in the collective Okinawan consciousness. The entanglements in Teruya and Sakata's works, I argue, foreground critical questions regarding the articulation and transmission of Okinawan identity: In what ways might a non-Okinawan artist apprehend, or mediate memories inscribed in place? Conversely, how does an Okinawan artist sustain or reconfigure cultural memory and belonging from a position of geographic migration?

Memory is frequently conceptualized as being rooted in direct experience, with much of the prevailing scholarship focusing on Holocaust studies to address mass trauma. Holocaust scholar Michael Rothberg asserts that memory is "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing," a framework that aligns with the mechanisms of Hirsch's

postmemory.[6] Drawing on Rothberg's characterization of memory—which argues that the global prominence of Holocaust memory has enabled the articulation of other historical narratives—as comparative rather than competitive, and the application of multidirectional memory to Japanese contexts, I employ this framework and strategy to effectively analyze memory structures in Okinawa.[7] Okinawa, as a small southern prefecture in Japan, can also serve as a significant case study within memory studies, for Okinawan memories, especially in today's political climate led by the post-Reversion generation, is inseparable with Okinawan sense of indigeneity, which should be defined a political strategy for legitimized representation than a social or ethnic identity. As such, not only Teruya, a born-raised Okinawa-native (*uchinānchu*) who bears the surname that can be traced as far back to Ryūkyū era, but also Sakata, an "inlander" (*naichā*) only moved to Okinawa as an adult, could (theoretically) have a comparable claim to Okinawa "indigeneity," sharing in the same injustice and fight for fair representation in national politics. For the post-Reversion generation who have no memory of their own of the actual event, the postmemory established through sharing of their experience growing up in post-1972 Japan and the researched or reconstructed public memories tied them together, and not the history itself.

In three chapters, this thesis details how Teruya and Sakata's works and their approach to contemporaneous Okinawa issues encapsulate the ways in which the post-Reversion "Okinawans" construct their sense of self in relation to significant historical experiences of loss, and in particular, their lack of memory. This lack of memory derives not just from the simple

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[6] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, (Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

[7] Rachel DiNitto, a Professor of Japanese Literature specializing in environmental and nuclear disaster, utilizes Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory to discuss the cultural trauma of the 3/11 earthquake and nuclear disaster ("Narrating the Cultural Trauma of 3/11: The Debris of Post-Fukushima Literature and Film," *Japan Forum* 26, no. 3 [2014]: 55, https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2014.915867.)

fact that the post-Reversion generation arrived in this world after the fact. This "lack" has resulted from the complex multi-generational active or accidental remembrance and forgetting that made today's Okinawan identity so precarious. Featuring Teruya's *結い, YOU-I* and Sakata's *About Opposite Shores*, which interpretively intervene on traditional Okinawan textile forms and Zainichi Korean experiences, the first chapter analyzes the ideological foundations of Japanese nation-building as a form of mythology that implicated Okinawa into the Japanese narrative of stewardship and unity, drawing upon Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined community. Building on this idea of artificial construct of nationhood continuing to exert observable (real) impact on Okinawans, the second chapter continues to feature the same set of works from chapter one but from a different lens, analyzing the movement of post-Reversion generation as a type of "migration" in Teruya and Sakata, both of whom experienced distinct journeys that profoundly influence their artistic practices. I investigate not only Teruya's migration as an artist but also the migration of his work, which was recently purchased by the British Museum, that I believe reveal Teruya's uniquely post-Reversion Okinawan subject position. Sakata's migration, on the other hand, displaces Japan's metropolises as the "center" of Japan's "mainland" by bridging the two peripheries that are closest to her own journey as a person and an artist (Niigata and Okinawa) with a yet another periphery, Jeju Island, Korea. Postmemory structures can be applied to individuals such as Sakata, who migrate in the aftermath of some traumatic events and subsequently "remember" the associated history. Finally, the third chapter uses Teruya's *It's about me/It's about you* and Sakata's *Remain – Niigata, Okinawa* to analyze the ways in which both Teruya and Sakata effectively integrate the medium of photography into their works through the concept of indexicality. Their works mirror how

photography mediates the post-Reversion generation's acts of remembrance of their own lived experience, impacting its identity as Okinawans.

Chapter One: Projection, Intervention, and Nationhood

Introduction

In 1879, Emperor Shō Tai, under Japanese pressure, abdicated the throne and moved to Tokyo, bringing the Ryūkyū Kingdom's independence to an end and establishing what is now the Okinawa Prefecture. As one of Japan's forty-seven prefectures, Okinawa's colonial history is subsumed into the broader Japanese national narrative of unity and rendering Okinawa's side of the story and Okinawa's distinct memories invisible. Japan as a new modern nation, which began with the reinstating of Emperor Meiji as its political leader in 1868, assimilated Ryūkyū as the nation's "prefecture" within a series of colonial projects that continued into the first half of the twentieth century, on the northern island, "Hokkaido," the traditional home of the Ainu, Taiwan, Korea, and Pacific islands. Meiji government justified its imperialist expansion through the enduring idealized visions of Japanese hegemony and unity across the Asian sphere under Japanese protection and leadership.

Naturally, the Japanese imperial concept of nationhood, like that of other colonial empires, is largely imaginary. Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, discusses the birth of nationhood in Creole and European contexts. Anderson clarifies the existence of nationhood and national consciousness, stating:

> [The nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the

past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.[8]

Anderson's framework of nationhood as a socially constructed community than a naturally occurring entity applies also to Japanese colonialism and its national mythos, through which their colonial projects where justified. These imagined connections are further facilitated through tangible connections of widely circulated media, such as newspapers and books.[9] However, claims to Japanese universalism is juxtaposed by the fact that Japan's wave of modernization barely reached Okinawa, where by 1889, a decade after annexation, the Okinawan population was largely illiterate, without newspaper circulation, and without a public library for another 26 years.[10] Here, Anderson's concept of imagined communities is particularly salient, wherein the very foundation of the Japanese national identity falters in Okinawa as neglect in developing the print industry and lack of totality in Japanese language reform of Ryūkyūan languages create fissures in this myth. Comparable to predicaments of many communities that survived the imperialist colonization, Ryūkyū's rich and unique language, art, as well as other tangible and intangible cultural heritage were lost, destroyed, or looted in the subsequent tumultuous years. Beginning in the postwar period of US occupation (*Amerika yū*), Okinawa residents began the

[8] Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Revised and Extended edition, (Verso, 1991), 7.
[9] Atsuko Ueda, "Sound, Scripts, and Styles: Kanbun Kundokutai and the National Language Reforms of 1880s Japan," *Language, Nation, Race: Linguistic Reform in Meiji Japan (1868-1912)*, 1st ed., vol. 1. (2021): 44, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2rb75j7.7.
[10] Stanisław Meyer, "Between a Forgotten Colony and an Abandoned Prefecture: Okinawa's Experience of Becoming Japanese in the Meiji and Taishō Eras," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 18, no. 20 (2020): 2, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466020030557.

process of unearthing—literally from the rubbles and figuratively through painstaking research and archiving—the region's histories and memories.

Fast-forwarding to post-1972, Okinawa prefecture in its post-Reversion era harks back to Ryūkyū art and culture and its distinct war experience to build solidarity among its residents and make a case for equitable representation in Japan's national politics. Today, the post-Reversion generation of adults are carrying the torch, advancing Okinawan identity and leading Okinawa's political activism. The post-Reversion generation, who are the children of the postwar baby boomers, is at least three generations removed from assimilation of Ryūkyū Kingdom, twice removed from any lived experience of the Pacific War, and do not have their own experiential memory of *Amerika yū*. Each Okinawan of this generation rely on the postmemory of inter and trans-generational trauma-transfer to establish one's own identity and make sense of the generational lived experiences of the ongoing injustice that Okinawa receives from Japanese government, and by extension from *naichā*.

Spotlighting an example from Teruya Yūken's acclaimed iterations of *bingata*, *結い* [yui]*, YOU-I*, and Sakata Kiyoko's multimedia installation, *About Opposite Shores*, this chapter presents two exemplars of how the post-Reversion generation can activate memories under the postmemory framework to make Okinawa visible on the global stage and advocate for its political cause. Although they are both post-Reversion Okinawans, Teruya and Sakata differ in the depth of their biological ties to Okinawa's soil. Unlike Teruya, who is a multi-generation *uchinānchu*, Sakata is a "*shima naichā*" (lit. inlander on the island), a native "inlander" simply living on the island. While Teruya's work taps into the postmemory of Okinawa's trauma through imaginative investment in a textile-making technique dating back to Ryūkyū, Sakata interweaves her personal memory and postmemory of her home prefecture of Niigata—a snowy

periphery of modern Japan, but historically a site of dynamic oceanic trade along and across the Sea of Japan/East Sea—with the postmemory of her adopted home, Okinawa, and empathetic vicarious engagement with the memory of a poet, who was a "Japanese resident of Korean descent" otherwise known as Zainichi 在日. Although their approaches differ, Teruya and Sakata both disrupt the Japanese national mythos, revealing sediments of their colonial past, overlaid with contemporary concerns on environment, belonging, and solidarity with global communities.

Reclaiming and Reimagining *Bingata* in *結い, YOU-I*

Teruya Yūken in his 2002 work, *結い, YOU-I* (fig. 1) highlights the dissonance between the constructed Japanese national identity and the tangible experiences of Okinawa. 結い (yui; pronounced "you-ee") is a Japanese term that denotes tying or intertwining as well as mutual cooperation. The English portion of the title, "YOU-I," is not only a phonetic play on the Japanese pronunciation but also a clever indication of the Japanese meaning. "You" refers to another person and "I" representing oneself is bound by the hyphen. Thus, "YOU-I" becomes both a visual and phonetic bridge between "you" and "I." This raises the questions of the intended subject of the title: Teruya and the viewer, Okinawans and the Japanese, Asia and the West, or the broader global communities. Such inquiry encourages audiences from diverse backgrounds to examine the origins of difference. Specifically, the question arises as to what differentiates "you" from "I." For the post-Reversion generation in Okinawa, this issue is particularly relevant, as distinctions and commonalities are blurred by repeated episodes of occupation, erasure, and assimilation.

YOU-I features an *uchikake* 打ち掛け, the outer layer of a kimono, and represents one of his early forays into *bingata*, a traditional Okinawan textile art form originating from the Ryūkyū

Kingdom. Translated literally as "red pattern or stencil," *bingata* employs a resist-dye technique characterized by stenciling, where rice paste, glue, and pigments are intricately utilized to create layered designs. *Bingata* garments were traditionally associated with the Ryūkyū royal family, originally crafted for their everyday use. As this practice trickled down through social strata, it found applications beyond daily wear for royalty and became employed in performance costuming, ritual furnishings, and as tribute goods. Ryūkyūans once employed dance and theater as a diplomatic tool to navigate political relationships with neighboring countries.[11] Wealthy commoners also adopted *bingata* for special occasions, through specific patterns and pigments, particularly vermillion, continued to be reserved exclusively for royal use.[12] The *bingata* robes reimagined by Teruya may not be historically accessible to all post-Reversion Okinawans. Teruya acknowledges:

> The style may not belong to the local people of the Ryūkyū kingdom, but it is one of my desperate efforts to grasp something to help us discover who we are and how we relate to the past. Everything has disappeared, literally everything is gone. Maybe if the war did not happen, I would choose something different, or other elements could be suggested to represent Okinawan people.[13]

[11] Hideyo Konagaya, "Heritage Production in National and Global Cultural Policies: Folkloristics, Politics, and Cultural Economy in Ryūkyūan/Okinawan Performance." *Asian Ethnology* 79, no. 1 (2020): 50, https://doi.org/10.15119/00003123.
[12] Yoshinori Chigira, *Bingata: Only in Okinawa,* (Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2016), 97.
[13] Teruya Yūken, in conversation with Jonathan Watkins, artist talk, Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, London, October 10, 2022.

Because *bingata* was closely bound to the Ryūkyū royal family and courtly contexts, this practice was a marker of elite status rather than universally accessible to the general populace of Ryūkyū. Teruya identifies this gap in access in the historical fissures created by the colonial occupations and WWII. The performance and spectacle of dance, when presented through an artist's reinterpretation of a courtly robe, can serve as a form of postmemory, wherein inherited or mediated histories are embodied and reactivated through gesture, costume, and movement rather than through direct lived experience. This is especially so following the devastations of WWII that destroyed many *bingata* workshops and uprooted the lives of their customers, endangering the tradition that has already been declining since Japanese occupation in the Meiji period. Emulating the traditional *bingata* technique, Teruya infuses his work with vibrant, contrasting hues inspired by Okinawa's flora and fauna. In the creation of his textile piece, Teruya draws the stencils and partners with master artisan, Kinjō Hiroji 金城広次 (1969), to apply the dye. For Teruya, the *bingata* process necessitates collaboration, with the help of multiple experts and workshops, calling back to the piece's title of community. Here, we see that *bingata* is a lived tradition that is not only practiced by these workshops but are continually renewed by artists like Teruya.

YOU-I, held at the Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum (hereafter OkiMu), serves as a significant subversion of the national imaginary. By the 1920s, nearly four decades after Japan annexed Okinawa, the *mingei* (民芸) movement, founded by Yanagi Sōetsu 柳 宗悦, Hamada Shōji 濱田 庄司, and Kawai Kanjirō 河井 寬次郎, gained substantial traction in Japan. This movement was bolstered by the growing interest in "folk craft" which emerged as a response to secure Japaneseness amid the pressures of colonial modernity and the looming

influence of the West.[14] The movement had particular interest in the cultural expressions of other Japanese colonies, like Okinawa and Korea, integrating their practices into the broader Japanese canon under the category of *mingei*. *Bingata*, one of the highest forms of Ryūkyū cultural production, was consequently abbreviated into mere craft. Yanagi, among others saw Okinawa as an archive of an idealized Japanese past which not only complemented but also contested the historical richness associated with the Western medieval period. This perspective furthered narratives of Japanese national pride.[15]

Okinawa serves as a crossroads for multiple empires: the Ryūkyūan, Ming Chinese, Japanese, and American. In this way, Okinawa represents a layered space of colonialism, with a history deeply rooted in occupation, marginalization, violence, national tensions. The layers of Ryūkyūan heritage, Japanese imperial rule, American occupation, and postwar Japanese developments coexist and are not so easily concealed. Andreas Huyssen, a widely published scholar on the politics of memory, engages with the ways we can approach troubling sites in which the perceptions of contemporary constructions do not align with devastating historical events. Huyssen uses the newly built metropolis of Berlin following the fallout of WWII and the Nazi regime as an example of what he calls an "urban palimpsest," and writes that the city "…implies voids, illegibilities and erasures but it also offers a richness of traces and memories, restorations, and new constructions that will mark the city as a lived space."[16]

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[14] Kim Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan*. (Duke University Press, 2007), 38.
[15] Yūko Kikuchi, *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory: Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism*, (Routledge Curzon, 2004), 156.
[16] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, (Stanford University Press, 2003), 84.

Instead of rebuilding the postwar decimated land into a high-rise urban city like Berlin, Okinawa—still in the midst of layered colonialism, if we considered Ryūkyū to be its original regional identity—was refigured into a tropical paradise for tourists. Following 1972 Reversion, the Okinawa Tourism Association, or the Okinawa Kankyō Kyōkai 沖縄観光協会 (OTA) was developed for this purpose.[17] Under the advice of Senge Testuma 千家哲磨, a mainland Japanese and executive managing director of the Japanese National Park Association, tropical aesthetics were favored over native plants (fig. 2) to rebuild Okinawa's image as an ideal vacation destination.[18] We can adapt Huyssen's concept to Okinawa, in other words, and think of it as a tropical palimpsest, where multiple temporalities coexist. There, underneath the paradisiac lush ecological life, still exist deep scars of the Battle of Okinawa and the Reversion.

Returning to Teruya, *YOU-I* reclaims *bingata* as a modality from mainland Japanese contexts, penetrating through what Huyssen calls the layered histories. For post-Reversion Okinawans, *bingata* is an important medium of memory, representing a site of intersecting historical inscriptions, encompassing Ryūkyū political and ceremonial practices, Japanese appropriation as national folk craft, U.S. occupation and wartime devastation, and the tropical aestheticization associated with tourism branding. These historical traces function analogously to an urban palimpsest, where successive layers remain embedded within contemporary surfaces, partially concealed yet persistently present. Read through the framework of postmemory, Teruya's engagement with bingata can be understood as an experience and mediation of these traces rather than directly recalled. In this way, Teruya's work makes affective inheritance visible.

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[17] Gerald Figal, "Between War and Tropics: Heritage Tourism in Postwar Okinawa," *The Public Historian* 30, no. 2, (2008): 93, https://doi-org.uoregon.idm.oclc.org/10.1525/tph.2008.30.2.83.
[18] Figal, "Between War and Tropics: Heritage Tourism in Postwar Okinawa," 95.

Teruya's reclamation of *bingata* is not simply about creating an artwork using this technique, but a layered process involving the production and exhibition of his robes. In addition to tapping into the workshop-based *bingata* production process excavated by preceding generations of artisans and scholars through trial-and-error and painstaking archival research, Teruya situates the *uchikake* as an art piece in tandem to being a practical garment to be used. To elaborate, Teruya employs several display methods across his exhibitions in various institutions. Here, I will sample three different *YOU-I* installations to give a sense of the variated display methods. For example, in his first United Kingdom show, *La Mer*, at the Daiwa Foundation Japan House, some works like the 2022 version of *YOU-I* are mounted flush against the wall (fig. 3), while another robe, *Scarlet Birds, Crimson Sky* (2010) is displayed on a mannequin with a red inner robe and red socks (fig. 4). A section of the robe is pinned up to reveal red socks, evoking the slow entrance scene of the classical Ryūkyū women's dance, *onna odori* 女踊り.[19]

Through these choices, Teruya draws attention to the specific characteristics of each exhibition space and its context. The Daiwa Foundation Japan House, originally a private residence, has served as a center for Japanese and British relations in London since 1993, with a mission to foster understanding of Japan in Britain. By emphasizing both the Daiwa residence as an art space and the human figure through the mannequin, Teruya distinguishes between museums and other art spaces, explaining: "having a kimono on a mannequin will really help to feel the person with that pattern of kimono. I thought it was important to include that element because the space is not a museum and I wanted to keep that sense of a person, that it can be

[19] Japan Video Topics, "Ryūkyū Buyo: Okinawan Soul," YouTube video, 4:27, July 15, 2021, https://youtu.be/mSX8VaAV4RQ.

available for you."[20] Beyond the intimate setting of the home, the dressed mannequin emphasizes the human quality described by Teruya and further reinforces a form of performance art deeply fastened to the Ryūkyū Kingdom. For audiences unfamiliar with Okinawa, Teruya seeks to reduce feelings of estrangement from his work, emphasizing that *bingata* remains a living and familiar tradition.

In another iteration at the Naha Cultural Arts Theater in 2022, at least five robes were displayed on mannequins oriented in various directions and staged on wooden pallets.[21] This arrangement allowed viewers to observe the robes from multiple perspectives and in close proximity. Teruya establishes a human connection between the robes and the audience not only through the use of human figures but also through the spatial arrangement and display methods. By placing the robes on wooden pallets, Teruya avoids stagnating Okinawan traditions such as *bingata*. Instead, he conveys a sense of movement both through his interventions in the form and through the varied contexts in which the robes are presented. Teruya comments on this display method in stating, "Because I had the image of 'mobile,' or something being carried, I used pallets, a platform used for transporting things."[22] The contrast between the typical museum pedestals, which are minimalistic, opaque, and white, and the pallets, which are worn, non-uniform, and raw, also underscores a deliberate distancing from the conventions of the museum institution.

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[20] Teruya Yūken, artist talk, October 10, 2022.
[21] Paly channel, "【芸術アート】なはーと　海外で活躍中のアーティスト「照屋勇賢さん」展示会　現代アート　復帰 50 周年" YouTube Video. July 8. 2022. https://youtu.be/ZZyao0MMs1s?si=kOPgDpamQYeIKw9F.
[22] 照屋勇賢 (Teruya Yuken), *Okinawa Heavy Pop* (Naha: 沖縄県立博物館・美術館, 2023), 125.
物を運ぶためのプラットフォームであるパレットを使用するのには、何かが運ばれていくという「モバイル」のイメージがありました。

Finally, in 2023, Teruya's first large-scale solo exhibition at the OkiMu moves further in the expression of ghostly present-and-absent body by not only harking back to the presentation style of the previously mentioned *La Mer* show, in featuring works in multiple display modes, but rather than using a mannequin, Teruya displays one robe on a rod, which invokes a simplified version of traditional robe-hanging systems (fig. 5). The rod emerges from the neckline of the robe, emphasizing the absence of the human head. This presentation addresses the lack of the human body by substituting it with an element that suggests corporeality without directly representing it. Especially notable is Teruya's decision to present *bingata* as an art object in *Okinawa Heavy Pop*, which, I contend, marks a profound reorientation of both material and meaning. OkiMu separates the historical objects from the art (fig. 6). *Okinawa Heavy Pop* was positioned in the art space. Furthermore, reference numbers 1, 5, 6, and 7 (marked in blue) designate these rooms as Museum Permanent Exhibition and Special Exhibition, while reference numbers 8 and 9 (marked in red) identify spaces as "galleries", with "Art Museum" indicated in parentheses.[23] Not only does the map separate these spaces by color and title, but also in the map's thematic icons which show illustrations like of a dinosaur in the blue space and a cube sitting on a pedestal in the red. These iconographic differences make these distinctions clear. These varied approaches simultaneously reclaim and redefine Okinawan visual culture, marking a reorientation of the medium's meaning. Although OkiMu is still a regional museum, Teruya's exhibit was still reached in the mainland, landing on popular art blogs such as Tokyo Art Beat.[24] Within the fine art space, *bingata* no longer serves as an emblem of an exoticized regional

[23] Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum, floor map, n.d., PDF file, https://okimu-jp-e.athp.transer.com/userfiles/files/floor_map.pdf

[24] "照屋勇賢 オキナワ・ヘヴィー・ポップ," Tokyo Art Beat, accessed June 7, 2026, https://www.tokyoartbeat.com/events/-/Yuken-Teruya-Okinawa-Heavy-Pop/2455D679/2023-11-03.

identity or commodity but rather a carrier of narrative, memory, and critique within a lived practice. The work thus performs a double inversion: it elevates the everyday to the level of the conceptual, and it grounds fine art in the textures of lived tradition.

Collectively, these variations in venue and his methods of exhibition allow *YOU-I* to be present in multiple colonial times and spaces, from a ghostly hollow presence in the house of a former British Empire, purchased through a funding from (former) Daiwa Securities Co., dating back to Japan's own colonial period of 1902, to "contemporary art" piece within OkiMu, which emerged first as an immediate postwar efforts to preserve cultural and folk artifacts of prewar Okinawa/Ryūkyū. In these varied approaches, I aim to highlight the intentionality behind the display that emphasizes the human body, even when such emphasis is not always explicit. Although presented within an art context, the practical traditions of bingata continue to resonate with contemporary audiences, who may not have tangible interactions with the practice itself.

The complexity of Teruya's work is heightened by the inclusion of a performance by traditional dancer Miyagi Shigeo 宮城茂雄, who wears Teruya's pieces as costume. Ryūkyū court dances were performed exclusively by men, however, in other cases of performance, like in the experimental venue Humboldt Lab Dahlem, Teruya features female dancers as well. The work embodies both reverence and reinterpretation as Teruya binds himself to what Okinawa prefecture cultivated and now promotes as its "tradition" through meaning rather than medium. Choosing *bingata* for *YOU-I* transforms the physical act of "tying together," as in weaving, to an emotional and cultural connection between people—binding histories, identities, and relationships through color and pattern rather than fiber and weave. In this transformation, Teruya not only reclaims *bingata* as a vessel of Okinawan identity and memory but also redefines what it means to see, value, and call something "art." *Bingata* patterns were once

mobilized and dynamically changed into folds and contours through the movement of the wearer's body. Teruya's inherited form now invites the viewer into a new kind of movement, of historical reflection and emotional resonance. Teruya both honors tradition and challenges its boundaries, allowing *bingata* to speak not through the body but instead the gaze, narrative, and memory.

The palimpsestic layering occurs not only in Teruya's installation strategies of *YOU-I*, but also in his choice of motifs that adorn each iteration of the robe. Much like *bingata* of the Ryūkyū period, Teruya presents bold and distinct colors, while skillfully orchestrating a sense of harmony through symmetrical designs, guiding the viewer's gaze across the composition. Teruya's practice demonstrates the structural processes of postmemory in not just the reclamation of the art form itself, but also in his imaginative interventions of design. Military motifs overlap with the vibrancy of postwar constructions in Okinawa's tropical image of a culturally colorful and politically neutral island. These multihued landscapes thinly veil the longstanding struggles that Okinawans have over the land for sovereignty within the Japanese government and against the U.S. military bases. In this way, memory is transmitted and facilitated through this creative process, in which inherited forms are reimagined to engage with mediated histories and present-day concerns. *YOU-I* eschews a straightforward narrative logic, as military elements coexist with Okinawan wildlife. Because the military and political motifs are so small and integrated into floral patterns harking back to the Ryūkyū's past, one must move back and forth in front of the piece to take in both elements. The physical movement of the viewers is the key to creating a palimpsest effect in what is, at first glance, a dream-like composition of tropical colors. Furthermore, it firmly grounds itself in the island's geographical and ecological realities. Postwar Okinawa was an entirely unfamiliar landscape due to the

overwhelming destruction of properties and death in the Okinawan community. Commercial developments that followed the war was a direct consequence of shifting national narratives. Military bases were established, and Japanese businesses took root, regardless of Okinawa's fragile postwar environment.

From a distance, military motifs, including fighter planes and parachuting soldiers, are partially obscured by the overstimulating arrangement of colors and forms. The piece necessitates a closer examination of the artwork in order to notice camouflaged details. Teruya constructs a skyline dominated by billowing clouds and aircraft in the upper section, while the weeping cherry and soldiers appear to cascade below. Notably, he integrates dugongs—an endangered marine mammal indigenous to Okinawa—rendered in a muted shade of purple, which subtly manifests again as a blue silhouette amid the clouds and planes. While this disregard of convention, in capturing both the sky and seafloor in one pane, is typical of *bingata* design, the representation of local Okinawan flora and fauna is not.[25] The lower half of the *uchikake* mirrors this approach, showcasing low-flying Osprey aircraft interwoven with Chinese and Japanese details like lotuses, butterflies, and flowing streams which are more typical examples of traditional *bingata* motifs. The entanglement of dugongs and fighter planes highlight the repercussions of Japanese nationalistic paradigms that overshadow Okinawa's unique topography and ecosystem. The title also resonates with Anderson's conceptualization of fraternity, directing the focus not towards Japan as a whole, but towards the Okinawan populace themselves.

Teruya describes the motivations behind *結い, YOU-I* in his statement:

[25] Chigira, *Bingata: Only in Okinawa,* 66.

I created it while imagining the commemorative ceremony for the withdrawal of the U.S. military base. It is a tribute to the people who could resolve the long-term problem of the U.S. military bases by firmly protecting the traditions and nature of their homeland while working hand in hand with other countries…The march in the work is expressed like a protest march because I want to convey to the future the image of Okinawan people of today.

米軍基地の撤退の記念式典の様子を思い浮かべながらこの作品を制作しました。他国と手を取り合いながらも散郷の伝統と自然をしっかりと守り抜き、長年にわたる米軍基地問題を解決することのできた民衆を讃えています。（中略）作中の行進がデモ行進のようなスタイルになっているのも、現在の沖縄県民の姿を未来へと伝えていきたいという思いによるものなのです。[26]

Teruya draws inspiration from several grassroots movements not only in Okinawa but also abroad, such as the sit in protests at the district of Takae 高江, the United Nations advocacy report given by the Association of Comprehensive Studies for Independence of the Lew Chawans (ACSILS), the protest at Henoko 辺野古, and the *Kamaduu* balloon protest.[27] *結い, YOU-I* title stitches two languages with a comma to suggest a dual solidarity, on a local and a global scale, particularly in light of Okinawans participating in what environmental scholar Sasha Davis calls "affinity geopolitics," which reflect the broader Indigenous solidarity

[26] 照屋，勇賢，沖縄県立博物館美術館, Yuken Teruya, and Okinawa Kenritsu Hakubutsukan Bijutsukan. *Okinawa Heavy Pop*, (沖縄県立博物館・美術館, 2023), 90.
[27] 照屋，勇賢，沖縄県立博物館美術館，Yuken Teruya, and Okinawa Kenritsu Hakubutsukan Bijutsukan, *Okinawa Heavy Pop*, 4.

movement including other islands like Guam, Jeju, and the Hawaiian Islands.[28] Teruya's conceptualization of a protest march actively challenges not only the U.S. militarization of Okinawa but also the neglect from the Japanese state. Postmemory operates through imagination to reconstruct and internalize removed histories. Teruya mediates fragments of the past such as the 1960 U.S.-Japan Security Treaty into something that feels more personally experienced like the current anti-base protests, constructing a history that feels more immediate. While Anderson posits that nations are conceptualized and reinforced through fraternity, Teruya reframes fraternity, steering it towards an imaginative community united by shared principles rather than delineated by political borders.

Lateral Engagement in Sakata Kiyoko's *About Opposite Shores*

As opposed to Teruya's *YOU-I* series, which connected the drilled deep into the layered history of Okinawa Islands and overlayed Ryūkyū and contemporary Okinawans' political struggles, the themes of transoceanic fraternity and constructed borders prominently feature in the oeuvre of Sakata Kiyoko. Sakata carefully engages with Okinawan issues not as an expert on the topic but rather as a collaborator, often looking to other global movements to examine the Okinawan realities she lives with. Sakata cross-references the complex historical layers of a formerly unified Korea with those of Okinawa. In this respect, Sakata employs distinct memory fragments from Okinawa, Niigata, and Korea, which are partially interconnected due to their shared relevance to Japan's imperial history. By layering Okinawan and Korean histories, Sakata demonstrates how urban palimpsests emerge from interconnected logics of extraction and

[28] Sasha Davis, *The Empires' Edge: Militarization, Resistance, and Transcending Hegemony in the Pacific,* (The University of Georgia Press, 2015), 12.

occupation, thereby conceptualizing the Japanese empire as a structure rather than a singular event.

Sakata's engagement with overlapping memories is particularly apparent in her work *About Opposite Shores* (fig. 7), which draws parallels between Okinawa and Korea, both of which share a complex history of colonialism under Japanese rule. Under postmemory structures, Sakata imaginatively projects the Zainichi Korean experience into the context of Okinawa, where she currently lives, to connect diverse geographies, fostering a relational understanding of history that extends beyond a singular national narrative. As I mentioned in the introduction, the contemporary Okinawa identity is as much (or more so) a shared political memory than ethnicity. That said, there exists a distinction between Okinawa-born, *naichā*, and mainland immigrant, *shima uchinānchu*. Despite living on the island for more than half her life, Sakata does not openly claim an Okinawa identity in her works, preferring to express her solidarity under postmemory structures to transmit the memories of Okinawa with personal and external fragments to obliquely or indirectly connect her, as a mainlander, to the contemporary Okinawan political struggles. By doing so, Sakata successfully makes the Okinawa present visible in a trans-Asian stage in a different way from Teruya. As an outsider of Okinawa, Sakata engages with the literary contributions of Kim Si-Jong 김시종 (1928), a Zainichi poet, whose collection "Niigata" serves as a pivotal reference point, reflecting her own roots.[29]

Zainichi 在日 is a term often associated with ethnic Koreans, who had to remain on the Japanese archipelago following Japan's defeat in WWII, and their descendants. The Korean

[29] Although Kim publishes under his Japanese name, Kin Jishō 金時鐘, his work is rooted in his Korean identity. I follow the convention of Heo Young-sun, "Jeju 4·3 was 'an Explosive Realization of Justice,'" *From Truth to Peace Jeju 4·3*, Jeju 4·3 Peace Foundation, in referring to him by his Korean name, Kim Si-jong.

experience of Japanese colonialism, with many similarities to Okinawa, also disrupts notions of Japanese unity. The Korean diaspora is rooted in the Japanese occupation of the peninsula, as part of one of the many colonial projects that followed the rapid modernization during the Meiji Restoration. This occupation ended after Japan's defeat in World War II, in which administrative processes were facilitated by the U.S. While many Koreans were repatriated following Japan's surrender in 1945, a significant number were unable to return. As scholars of Korea's colonial history Mark E. Caprio and Yu Jia write,

> In short, thanks to the cultural and racial biases held by the U.S. Military Government, a lack of basic security and livelihood, political turmoil, and the ill-coordinated liaison between the Japanese Occupation and the Korean Occupation, a substantial number of Koreans found themselves stranded in postwar Japan.[30]

This population—caught between two nations in flux—became the Zainichi Korean community, living in Japan without clear citizenship, stable rights, or full belonging in either Korea or Japan.

Zainichi Korean experiences reveal the enduring legacies of colonialism, displacement, and the politics of identity in postwar East Asia. By drawing on the Zainichi experience, Sakata advances the discourse on imagined communities. The very existence of Zainichi Koreans stand in contrast to Japan's assertion of a stable national identity. It is important to note the unilateral engagement by Sakata with Kim's poems. Rather than collaborating directly, Sakata draws inspiration from Kim's published work, engages with his writing, and incorporates his work into

[30] Mark E. Caprio and Yu Jia, "Between the Nations: Diaspora and Koreans in Japan," *Diaspora without Homeland: Being Korean in Japan*, ed. Sonia Ryang and John Lie (University of California Press, 2009), 37.

her own artistic practice. Sakata's engagement should not be reflexively dismissed as purely colonial. Instead of simply reproducing a colonial gesture by appropriating a Zainichi poem, the artist engages with the source material through a practice informed by her lived experience in Okinawa and Niigata. As a result, her work can be interpreted as a postmemory construction of a historical triangulation among Okinawa, Korea, and Niigata. while also emphasizing a solidaristic relationship between Okinawa and Korea. This approach challenges and complicates Japan's national mythos, as Sakata constructs a geopolitical triangle among three displaced bodies: Kim Jishō, her past self in Niigata, and her present self in Okinawa. This configuration deliberately excludes or bypasses the conventional notion of the "nation," typically represented by the political center in Tokyo, the imperial body, or the cultural center of Kyoto. By connecting her experiences in Niigata and Okinawa through postmemory practices that mediate colonial Korea, Sakata forges links among Okinawa, Korea, and Niigata, not across land, but across two oceans: the South China Sea and the East Sea.

In fact, maritime imagery serves as a recurring motif in Sakata's artistic practice. Her deep affinity with the ocean is prevalent in her use of salt. Sakata's installation consists of a dual-screen video piece that juxtaposes two coastal perspectives: one from Niigata, gazing towards Korea, and the other from Tokusa, oriented towards Niigata. She conducted fieldwork during her travels for conferences or art shows in places such as Singapore, Korea, Okinawa, and Japan. Though the ocean is boundless, mobile, and omnipresent, her own engagement with it was constrained by the limits of travel. Unable to carry the sea with her aboard an airplane, she distilled its essence into salt from her hotel room—a tangible fragment of the ocean, portable yet infused with the place it came from.

For Sakata, who hails from the coastal prefecture of Niigata, the ocean is a source of emotional comfort and artistic inspiration. In transforming nature into art, Sakata negotiates boundaries—between homeland and diaspora, past and present, and personal and national histories—making the immensity of place and memory palpable for the audience. In relation to Okinawa, the ocean is more than a natural motif; it is a symbolic conduit connecting geography, memory, and identity. It evokes both the island's physical beauty and its history of trauma, while also articulating fluidity, exchange, and spiritual resonance, making it an enduring site for exploring personal, communal, and diasporic narratives.

Sakata's material for this specific piece utilizes salt from not just Japan and Korea, but from all the samples she collected. The ocean is both a passage and a blockade between countries. Sakata's decision not to strictly use salt sourced from Korean or Niigata shorelines shifts her work from directly reflecting the scope of Kim Si-Jong's practice, which centers on Korea and Japan, toward a mediated form shaped by varied salt sources. This approach transforms the piece into a personal interpretation. When artists use materials exclusively tied to the depicted location, their work often remains anchored in documentation. While this can be effective in ethnographic work or site-specific practices, it may also restrict the range of meanings to those inherent in the original context. By expanding the material beyond the source place, Sakata introduces a conceptual distance that enables broader interpretation and a deeper connection to Okinawa. Incorporating salt from other shorelines challenges conventional notions of authenticity and the prescriptive idea that oceans are confined to specific places. Through this strategy, Sakata interrogates the stability of borders, both in her use of salt and in her video format, prompting viewers to question or even forget which shore belongs to which nation. Sakata does not simply conflate Korea and Japan; instead, she fosters a dialogue among Korean,

Japanese, and Okinawan contexts, particularly for audiences unfamiliar with these historical conflicts.

A key component of this installation is the audio recording of a recitation of Kim's poem by Kim Mira 金美羅, an artist who graduated from the Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts.[31] Under postmemory structures, language plays a complicated role in transmission, as traumatic emotions and memories are often difficult to vocalize or translate.[32] Consequently, when language is insufficient to fully convey traumatic memories, transmission may occur through nonverbal and noncognitive acts. Sakata examines this phenomenon within the framework of postmemory by combining an altered verbal recitation with performance with overlaying salt blocks on the words. In her exploration of the interplay between the verbal/nonverbal and noncognitive transmissions of trauma, Sakata transmutes the poem to incoherent sounds, intentionally fragmenting Kim's memories into affective traces and mediating this information through creative interventions and overlays of the visual form. As the piece unfolds, a page from Kim's poetry collection, titled "Niigata" in both Japanese and Korean, is revealed. In a meticulous act of layering, the video reveals Sakata applying cubic salt crystals onto each syllable of the text as it is performed vocally in both languages. The audio transitions fluidly between Japanese and Korean, with occasional overlaps and asynchronous timing that challenge conventional understanding.

Language use remains particularly significant for post-Reversion Okinawans and subsequent generations from former Japanese colonies. The observed linguistic similarities and overlaps are not coincidental but instead represent enduring colonial legacies of assimilation and

[31] Jiaxin Yan, "Shores of (Dis)Intimacy: Sakata Kiyoko and Translations of Littoral Experience," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 52, no. 1 (2026): 52, https://doi.org/10.1525/jjs.2026.52.1.41.
[32] Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 112.

occupation. The Korean language, through Japanese occupation, have many Japanese loan words. In the meantime, the Ryūkyūans, and later Okinawans, were forbidden to speak in their native tongue, which were demoted to a mere "dialect" of the nationally endorsed artificial "standard" Japanese. In kind of a sound palimpsest, Kim's memory, Okinawan past and present, and Sakata as both Niigata native and Okinawan, overlap in the postmemory of the traumatic encounter with the Japanese imperial colonization in language, which can be heard in the Japanese-sounding words in Kim's Korean poem, as well as in the same poem read in Japanese—the language of colonizer of Ryūkyū and the language that dominates Sakata's own regional Niigata speech. In this sense, language is rendered as a colonial mechanism in which both the Koreans and Okinawans have had to adapt as part of Japan's assimilation laws. Moreover, this sonic performance aims to render the spoken words ambiguous. Sounds get jumbled, the written word becomes concealed, and we are left with a page indistinguishable from Korean or Japanese, fostering a new relational dynamic among the lexicons of both languages while transcending their traditional boundaries.

This layering of imagery and sound, speaks to Korea and Okinawa's layered histories, inviting the audience to engage with the work on both a visceral and cognitive level, prompting reflections on language, identity, and the interconnectedness of human experience. The salt itself becomes a potent symbol within the installation, embodying multiple metaphors: it represents a shared biological element—salinity within our bodies—evoking the notion of carrying the essence of an ocean, as well as a teardrop memorialized on a gravestone. Here, it is important to underscore that these "teardrops" are the salt cubes Sakata created. Through the salt-making process, Sakata participates and intervenes in the transmission of trauma and adds her own bodily memory to the visitors' experience of the Korea-Okinawa-wartime postmemory.

Sakata's artistic process, akin to Teruya's, explores the concept of connection amidst suffering. She articulates that *About Opposite Shores* "considers how we navigate these seas today, establishing a dialogue between the two and igniting our imaginations."[33] Kim's work frequently reflects his traumatic experiences as a Zainichi writer and a participant in the 1948 Jeju Uprising.[34] Similar to the situation in Okinawa, there exists a persistent tension between Zainichi Koreans and the notion of Japanese unity, deeply rooted in a colonial history that permeates Japanese society. The characteristic of salt, capable of dissolving or melting away, serves to unveil the underlying words once again, not dissimilar to the ways in which the waves on the shore obscure the sand underneath only to reveal it once more as it retracts. In this way, salt, drawn from the sea and imbued with both harshness and preservation, is layered over Zainichi poetry, transforming vulnerability into endurance. While the salt evokes memory, loss, and the weight of history, it simultaneously safeguards and amplifies the poetic voice, asserting the resilience of culture and identity.

Through this interplay, the artwork carries a quiet optimism: despite displacement and marginalization, memory can be preserved, honored, and renewed. This property metaphorically illustrates the complexities of colonial modernity and nation-building—a multifaceted process that fails to completely obliterate its historical traces, thereby complicating the identity formation

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[33] *Kiroku-shū sakata kiyoko-ten taigan junkan suru fūkei* 記録集 阪田清子展 対岸−循環する風景, ed. Hosomi Kazuyuki 細見和之 (Kobunesha 小舟舎, 2018).
[34] The Jeju Uprising (1947-1954) where a series of escalated protests against police brutality and the upcoming May 1948 elections, in which many believed to lead to permanent division between North and South Korea, culminated into at least 25,000 deaths; see Park, Soul. "The Unnecessary Uprising: Jeju Island Rebellion and South Korean Counterinsurgency Experience 1947-48." Small Wars & Insurgencies (Abingdon) 21, no. 2 (2010): 359–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2010.481432.

of colonized individuals. On *About Opposite Shores*, curator Machida Megumi 町田恵美 underscores the importance of interpersonal connections amid vulnerability and states:

> The cyclical movements of the breaking down of words, then replacing them with salt crystals, reminds us of a relationship that can be broken apart and rebuilt. If you are unable to stand up by yourself, or when you are about to tumble down, what you need is a relationship with the other.
> 言葉の解体や、文字を塩の結晶に置き換えながら生じる一連の循環は、崩れながらも築いていく関係を思わせる。自分の力だけでは立てない、人は少し崩れそうなとき他人を必要とするのではないか。[35]

This statement encapsulates Sakata's vision of bridging relationships with people in the face of historical and social challenges as well as an overarching theme of imagined community, a hopeful prospect evident in her other works. This underscores the mechanisms by which discrete fragments are strategically assembled to construct a coherent identity or outcome. As a post-Reversion artist and the absence of direct experiential continuity, Sakata synthesizes the linguistic residues of Kim's poetry—rooted in the Japanese colonial encounter—while imaginatively projecting herself outward, by simultaneously inflecting Kim's work with her own upbringing in Niigata. Through this process, she interrogates her precarious positionality as a mainland Japanese artist residing in Okinawa, critically examining the fluid and contested dynamics of center-periphery relations between these locales as well as the layered colonial

[35] Machida Megumi, Sakata, Kiyoko, *Kiyoko Sakata Solo Exhibition "Oscillating Vessels"* (Okinawa: self-published, 2021), 14.

traces of the Japanese Empire through her sonic interventions on language and treatment of salt as an art material.

Conclusion

Teruya Yūken and Sakata Kiyoko enact critical interventions across distinct artistic and literary modalities. Teruya appropriates the traditional craft of *bingata*, strategically reconfiguring its visual lexicon to address the contemporary realities of Okinawa's militarization and its resonance with global Indigenous struggles. Sakata, meanwhile, projects the lived experiences of Kim Si-Jong onto her own biographical nexus—intertwining her connections to both Niigata and Okinawa through the mediating presence of the ocean. These practices elucidate the operations of postmemory as a structuring principle in the transmission of collective memory among post-Reversion generation, who must negotiate inherited historical narratives to articulate a coherent identity. Through their distinct approaches, Teruya and Sakata contest traditional narratives of nationhood that attempt to consolidate diverse experiences into a singular account. Rather than advancing a singular, fixed narrative of trauma, Teruya and Sakata demonstrate the post-Reversion generation's ability to transmit memories by utilizing fragments embedded within the temporal layers of colonialism. These fragments, found in objects and stories not directly derived from their own experiences, serve as sites of creative intervention. Through this process of "recall," they reinforce a diverse and multifaceted sense of identity grounded in tangible materials such as *bingata* and salt.

Their works reveal the ways in which the Japanese imagination, shaped by aspirations toward colonial modernity, relied on the foundational fallacy of Japanese nationhood, a process that resulted in fragmented histories and a cultural landscape where multiple narratives coexist

and interact. Teruya and Sakata's work also highlight how Okinawan issues of identity resonate with other islands and indigenous communities internationally through shared geopolitical affinities, fostering a sense of solidarity among themselves. Artists, activists, diasporas, and cultural producers influence geopolitical meaning beyond government bureaucracy and formal diplomacy. Such methodologies resist the Japanese national imaginary which constructs "Japan" as a coherent, homogenous, and unified nation, thereby cloaking diversity within their political domain, colonial histories, and regional differences.

Chapter Two: Re-expression Through Migration

Introduction

While *bingata* textiles and the island's tropical ecology are more obvious visual markers of Okinawa, migration operates as a diagnostic site that renders the political dimensions of Okinawan identity visible. This chapter continues the analysis of Teruya Yūken's *YOU-I* and Sakata Kiyoko's *About Opposite Shores*, by shifting focus to the impact of the artists' migrating bodies and to how their works intervene in the present and future post-Reversion generations' access to the Okinawa postmemory. For Teruya, the investigation extends beyond the artist's own movement, but also the movement of his artwork, specifically, the ramifications of the recent purchase of a version of *YOU-I* by the British Museum. For Sakata, *About Opposite Shores* examines the movement of the center-periphery dynamic between Korea, Niigata, and Okinawa through a close reading of Kim's poem itself, an investigation into the auditory breakdown of language, and Sakata's authorial control over power dynamics between these places.

Current migration studies on Okinawa primarily examine diaspora groups compelled to migrate due to governmental pressures and incentives. For instance, the first wave of Okinawans migrated to Hawaii in 1899 as a result of the prefecture's slow modernization and new land reforms, which enabled them to sell their land and finance their relocation to work as laborers abroad.[36] For the post-Reversion generation, mass migration does not constitute a current societal concern. Instead, using Teruya and Sakata as examples, this chapter demonstrates that for the post-Reversion generation, whose Okinawan identity is defined not by their birthplace but their

[36] Glen D. Hook and Richard Siddle, eds. *Japan and Okinawa: Structure and Subjectivity*. (Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 106.

engagement with the island's postmemory, mobility does not sever identity from its foundational context. The post-Reversion Okinawan identity could be portable, working to expose and destabilize the asymmetrical power relations that exists between layers of colonial palimpsest. In the case of Teruya, the artist and his works moves through the layers of colonial legacies between the "West," Japan, and Ryūkyū/Okinawa. Sakata traces the colonial lineage of Japan through a more Asian-centered perspective, in the triangulation of center-periphery relationships between Okinawa, Japan, and Korea.

Returning to the specific local context of the Japanese archipelago, when Japan incorporated Okinawa as a prefecture in 1879 and 1972, the region experienced a paradox in which assimilationist policies operated alongside persistent ontological exclusion. Fifty years after annexation, Okinawa had comparably the most inadequate infrastructure, characterized by a poorly developed road network and had the lowest standards in its healthcare and education systems and had almost no industrial development.[37] As a result, the mobilization of indigenous identity as a political articulation of alterity serves as an oppositional and subversive response to colonial structures of silencing. The post-Reversion generation, engaging with postmemory, faces ongoing disruption in efforts to recover Okinawan indigenous identity due to the enduring legacy of colonial violence. This disruption is evident in standardized mandatory education systems that exclude Ryūkyū and Okinawa histories and cultural heritages, as well as in persistent social, economic, and political inequalities encountered in daily life. The disconnect from one's cultural signifiers like the aforementioned textiles and even from the ocean and landscapes of their home, which could be brutally altered through government-sanctioned

[37] Stanisław Meyer, "Between a Forgotten Colony and an Abandoned Prefecture: Okinawa's Experience of Becoming Japanese in the Meiji and Taishō Eras," 4.

construction of military bases or by the needs of the tourist industry, means that for the post-Reversion generation, art and geographic ties cannot adequately encapsulate their "Okinawan" indigeneity. Rather, for this generation, indigeneity is articulated through a set of political demands aimed at redressing historical oppression, particularly through sustained resistance to the disproportionate presence of American military bases (a more detailed discussion of this definition follows in the next subsection). The post-Reversion generation thus asserts their Okinawan indigenous identity through political mobilization, which has significant implications for Japanese foreign and domestic policy.[38] Although Teruya technically had the option to attend an art university in Okinawa and remain on the island, greater opportunities to engage with the global art scene were available in Tokyo, along with increased political freedom for advocacy in the United States. Thus, while a choice existed, it was evident which option provided superior financial and political prospects. The conventional binary distinction between voluntary and involuntary (coerced) migration is insufficient, especially within the post-Reversion Okinawan context, where choice does not necessarily equate to full agency, and requires a more analytically rigorous and context-sensitive framework.

Born in the period of accessible air travels, the post-Reversion generation exists in a period characterized by increased normalization and accessibility of migration, resulting in the formation of transnational circuits of memory. Here, Katrin Antweiler's concept of "pluriversal memories" is helpful in articulating how postmemory of post-1879 mass violence and migration

[38] David McGrogan, "A Shift in Japan's Stance on Indigenous Rights, and Its Implications," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 17, no. 2 (2010): 368, https://doi.org/10.1163/157181110X495935.

in Okinawa was established and transmitted. Concerning memories in the Holocaust and post-migration societies, Antweiler observes:

> […] different memories of violence are entangled with each other and could even provide meaning for each other, and thus, if thought of more in terms of solidarity, create a sense of shared experience rather than leading to a struggle against each other.[39]

Pluriversal memory challenges the dominance of singular historical narratives by emphasizing the coexistence of multiple, unevenly recognized modes of remembrance. Antweiler contends that while collective memory is appealing due to its cohesive and clear-cut nature, which can be effective for political claims, pluriversal memories of violence recognize diverse experiences without privileging a single narrative. This inclusivity may foster an even stronger sense of fellowship than collective memory. Connecting to the circumstances of the post-Reversion generation, the ongoing migration to and from Okinawa requires active negotiation of Okinawan identity. Pluriversal memories can prevent the essentialization or stagnation of Okinawan identity.

Adapting Antweiner's concept of pluriversal memory, this chapter presents a nuanced perspective that encourages dialogues and honors the complexity of diverse histories. By addressing not just the literal movement of Teruya and Sakata as individuals, but also the ideals of migration in their works, this chapter (unlike the previous chapter) treats Teruya and Sakata's

[39] Katrin Antweiler, "Why Collective Memory Can Never Be Pluriversal: A Case for Contradiction and Abolitionist Thinking in Memory Studies," *Memory Studies* 16, no. 6 (2023): 1536, https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980231202337.

experiences, not as exemplars of the whole post-Reversion generation, but as single memory strands in the pluriversal postmemory that continues to inform the present and future Okinawan indigeneity. Postmemory transmission serves as a site for mediating fragmented histories and is shaped by patterns of mobility, as well as by the processes through which Okinawan histories circulate and are reinterpreted within global power structures. Migration and movement advance with Okinawan indigeneity. Migration does not represent a departure from Okinawan identity; instead, it serves as a vehicle in which the political condition of Okinawa and its precarious memory structures becomes apparent, ultimately enriching the discourse surrounding memory and identity within post-Reversion contexts.

What Does It Mean to Be Indigenous?

In analyzing the construction of identity within the context of migration and the Okinawan diaspora, it is essential to conceptualize Okinawan identity as fundamentally home-oriented, thereby challenging simplistic understandings of indigeneity. Conventional frameworks of indigeneity often emphasize originating ties to land and ethnicity, suggesting an inherent ethnic claim to a specific territory. In contrast, Okinawan indigeneity is less concerned with ancestral essentialism and is instead articulated through political claims to land, autonomy, and self-determination. In fact, the notion of indigenous peoples, translated as *senjūminzoku* 先住民族, is a contested concept within the Okinawan community because of the barbaric connotations to the term.[40] This, in part, is attributable to the distinctive modalities through which Japan

[40] Hidefumi Nishiyama, "Decolonial Encounter with Neo-nationalism: The Politics of Indigeneity and Land Rights Struggles in Okinawa," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 48, (2023): 297, https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12582.

colonized the Ryūkyū Kingdom, marked less by overt conquest than by a prolonged ambiguity of sovereignty that differentiates itself from other colonial projects. While the Ryūkyū kingdom nominally preserved its independence by maintaining tributary relations with both the Qing dynasty and the Satsuma domain, this formal autonomy obscured the progressive erosion of Ryūkyū agency, which culminated in the eventual coercive incorporation into the Japanese nation-state. The historical trajectory of Ryūkyūan sovereignty, characterized by the kingdom's complex diplomatic relations with other Asian countries, directly challenges the reductive indigeneity-as-primitivity narrative propped by the Japanese state—an ideological move that homogenized the diverse histories of Japan's colonies. In this context, I stray away from an ancestral focus on Okinawan indigeneity but rather a politically relational one that emphasizes pre-colonial sovereignty, colonial incorporation via annexation, and ongoing structural marginalization. This specificity is intentional, to avoid reproducing abstract or generalized notions of indigeneity which have been weaponized in neocolonial contexts to undermine the Okinawan activist movements' primary orientation towards issues of demilitarization and the pursuit of substantive political representation within Japan.[41] Okinawan indigeneity is inextricably entwined with the political, a dynamic equally evident in the island's migration history.

Contemporary Okinawan activism is tied to Radcliffe and Radhuber's notion of lower-case decolonization in which they write, "If Decolonization - with a capital D - refers to formal independence from direct colonial territorial governance, lower case decolonization (or decoloniality) speaks to ongoing struggles to challenge colonial modern relations of social,

[41] Nishiyama, "Decolonial Encounter with Neo-nationalism: The Politics of Indigeneity and Land Rights Struggles in Okinawa," 299.

spatial, territorial and epistemic power."[42] In post-Reversion Okinawa, where large-scale migration has ceased, measuring migration statistics presents challenges. Since Okinawa is officially a domestic territory of Japan, distinguishing 'foreign' immigrants is complicated because individuals from mainland Japan are legally classified as domestic. Instead of a symbolic achievement of statehood, the decolonization of Okinawa prioritizes land protection and relational authority while rejecting settler coercion.

Well before the profound environmental ruptures precipitated by World War II, Japanese interventions had already begun to reconfigure Okinawa's commercial landscape—most notably through the imposition of the sugarcane monoculture, which compelled Okinawan families to serve as agricultural suppliers for the Japanese mainland.[43] These extractive economic pressures, coupled with stringent assimilationist policies, catalyzed Okinawan migration to the Japanese mainland and to diasporic destinations such as Brazil. Such movements were frequently oriented toward temporary labor and remittance economies, further entangling questions of mobility with the structural legacies of imperialism. Thus, migration has historically been an endeavor for those seeking better opportunities due to the Japanese government's lack of structural support.

Migration persisted beyond the Reversion, undergoing significant transformation. By 2025, intra-prefectural migration involved approximately 28,000 individuals moving in and 29,000 moving out.[44] Pre-reversion migration was characterized by mass movements following

[42] Sarah A. Radcliffe and Isabella M Radhuber, "The Political Geographies of D/Decolonization: Variegation and Decolonial Challenges of /in Geography," *Political Geography* 78 (2020): 4, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102128.
[43] Shannon Welch, "The Transpacific on Fire: Sparks of Decolonial Resistance Across Okinawa and Brazil in Medoruma Shun's 'My Brazilian Granddad's Sake' (1999)," *Positions: Asia Critique* 33, no. 4 (2025): 763, https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-11924326.

major events such as Japanese occupation, World War II, and American occupation. In contrast, post-reversion migration was likely driven by similar factors on a smaller scale, including income disparities, unequal access to public services, and imbalances in population composition.[45] Many post-Reversion Okinawans regarded migration as a means of achieving social mobility and economic advancement, either by relocating to mainland Japan or seeking opportunities abroad. Migration patterns after reversion indicate that mobility remained influenced by uneven distributions of opportunity. Okinawans frequently migrated outward to access larger labor markets and higher wages, while mainland Japanese migrants moved to Okinawa to benefit from opportunities associated with tourism, government investment, military-related employment, and improved quality of life. In both cases, migration was shaped by perceptions that greater opportunities existed elsewhere.

A 2022 self-assessment survey of members of the Hyogo Prefecture Okinawan Association across three generations found that most respondents identified as both Japanese and Okinawan.[46] Rather than advocating for complete separation from Japanese identity, many Okinawans express a dual identity that recognizes both their membership in the Japanese nation and a distinct indigenous experience shaped by historical dispossession, military burden, and political marginalization. Unlike regional affinities felt by Japanese residents of Osaka, whose cultural pride was developed within the Japanese state, Okinawan identity carries the legacy of

[44] Statistics Bureau of Japan, "Basic Resident Registration Migration Report," Government Statistics Portal Site (e-Stat), accessed May 29, 2026, https://www.e-stat.go.jp/en/dbview?sid=0003422373.
[45] Tsuneo Oshiro, "Out-Migration Problems in Okinawa," *Studies in Regional Science* 8 (1977): 177, https://doi.org/10.2457/srs.8.173.
[46] Atsushi Hagihara and Hasan Topacoglu, "The Okinawan Diaspora in Mainland Japan: Insights from the Hyogo Prefecture Okinawan Association," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 23 (2025): 6, https://doi.org/10.1017/apj.2025.10013.

Ryūkyū sovereignty subsumed by colonial annexation and systematic suppression. These findings suggest that Okinawan indigeneity is politically constructed through historical relations with the state, rather than being based solely on ethnic difference.

Post-Reversion migration illustrates that Okinawan identity is maintained not only through direct experience but also through postmemory, which encompasses inherited narratives of migration, discrimination, war, and political marginalization. The persistence of a dual Okinawan-Japanese identity among migrants in Hyogo indicates that Okinawan indigeneity operates less as a strictly ethnic boundary and more as a political identity sustained by collective memories of Okinawa's historical relationship with the Japanese state. Member H, of the survey participants for example, "…worked in Kobe around the time of Okinawa's reversion and did not have a clear sense of identity…as Member H became more aware of their Okinawan roots, they noticed that mentioning their own surname—the most common in Okinawa—often required explanations in the past. Now, people recognize it instantly.[47] Okinawans who migrate from the islands carry inherited memories that reinforce a distinct identity in new locations, while mainland Japanese who settle in Okinawa encounter a social environment shaped by these same memories. Continued migration after reversion thus contributes to the ongoing reproduction and renegotiation of Okinawan identity, positioning it as a political identity rooted in collective remembrance rather than as a fixed ethnic category.

Although both artists are officially recognized as Japanese nationals, possessing Japanese passports, this analysis foregrounds the migratory experiences of Teruya as an Okinawan and Sakata as a mainland Japanese to examine how the postmemory framework complicates the

[47] Hagihara and Topacoglu, "The Okinawan Diaspora in Mainland Japan: Insights from the Hyogo Prefecture Okinawan Association," 7.

concept of a physical homeland. The persistence of Okinawa as "home," even among individuals born or raised outside the islands, demonstrates how inherited narratives of migration, war, and U.S. occupation captures the sense of the physical and affective dimensions of Okinawa's territory-based identity, which grounds the indigenous claims to self-determination regardless of current residence.

Teruya Yūken: When the Artist and Art Move

In the *結い, YOU-I* series, Teruya Yūken employs a strategy that intertwines Okinawan culture and nature, which are highly valued by both domestic and international tourists, with the pervasive presence of the US military. This linkage is intended to provoke viewers into action or, at minimum, to spark interests among other local activists worldwide in Okinawa's colonial condition to forge transnational solidarities.

Through his artistic interventions, Teruya amplifies Okinawan voices within global discourses and actively contributes to cultural and political advocacy. The inclusion of silhouettes of F-16 fighter jets and V-22 Ospreys in *YOU-I* signals not just the large presence of these aircrafts but also the various activist movements against their operation, still ongoing on the island today, such as the large-scale protest in 2012 against the V-22.[48] This protest was driven by concerns over aircraft safety and noise pollution, particularly following documented crashes of the aircraft.

Although Teruya's residence in Berlin rather than Okinawa may come as a surprise, given that his most highly received bodies of work centers on Okinawa, this does not diminish

[48] "Anti-Osprey Rally in Okinawa," *Japan Focus* 10, no. 54 (2012): e68, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466012016555.

his advocacy for Okinawan issues. He maintains a strong connection to his Okinawan heritage through the subjects of his art, leveraging it to problematize the notion of "Japanese" identity itself. Acknowledging his Japanese identity, Teruya states, "I have a Japanese passport, but I am not comfortable considering myself Japanese. The Japanese government focuses a lot on monoculture; one culture, one origin, and I am not part of that. I am happy to promote Japan as a plural, as Japans, because it has diversity."[49] Teruya advocates for the recognition of a diverse Japan, aligning with the broader demands of Okinawan activist groups. According to a 2026 United Nations statement by The Association of Comprehensive Studies for Independence of the Lew Chewans (an alternative transliteration of Ryukyu), these groups continue to call for their voices to be acknowledged by the Japanese government and for official recognition as indigenous peoples on the archipelago.[50] Similar to these groups, Teruya operates on a global stage through both his migration and his artistic practice.

Teruya's own migration journey foregrounds the structural asymmetries between Okinawa and Japan, while simultaneously inscribing his practice within broader discourses of modernity, cultural translation, and postcolonial subjectivity. Teruya's initial departure from Okinawa in 1996 to undertake a BFA in oil painting at Tama Art University in Tokyo—a metropolitan center of cultural and political capital—marks a critical juncture in his artistic and geographic trajectory. This relocation afforded him greater mobility and access to institutional networks, amplifying his visibility and reach within the Japanese art world. Notably, his engagement with oil painting, a medium historically adopted by Japan through Western influence during the Meiji era, signals a complex negotiation of transnational aesthetic

[49] Teruya Yūken, artist talk, October 10, 2022.
[50] Academic Conference of Searching for Independence of Lequio (ACSILs), "ACSILs Statement, UNPFII Twenty-Fifth Session," April 21, 2026, https://www.acsils.org/statements.

paradigms. Then in 2001, he makes a second departure for the United States to pursue an MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York. Teruya's decision to relocate was informed, in part, by the capacity to engage openly with politically charged Okinawan issues within transnational contexts that were more receptive to such activism.[51]

This strategic repositioning parallels broader Okinawan movements that increasingly mobilize international frameworks—such as those articulated through the United Nations—to advance claims for indigenous justice and self-determination. [52] Migration transforms the conditions under which Okinawan memories become legible. Teruya left Okinawa, and later Japan, on his own accord, and not out of desperation to meet one's basic living needs and dignity, as it was the case with Ryūkyūan or postwar Okinawan migrants under colonial circumstances. For Teruya, however, personally traversing through the infrastructures of migration—including physical borders, passports, visas, travel permissions, linguistic dislocation, and cultural estrangement—unlocked in him his family's postmemory, which he did not know he had.

Teruya's reflection on his political positionality as a migrant into and living in the United States (Brooklyn, New York), draws on his family's migration and the development of his art. In reference to his piece, *Earn lots of money. No need to write any letters. Just send home the money first* (2008), Teruya reflects on his experiences in Brooklyn, stating, "But at the same time, I discovered…my grandparents on my mother's side were Hawaii's 3rd generation

[51] Teruya Yūken, artist talk, October 10, 2022.
[52] The Association of Comprehensive Studies for Independence of the Lew Chewans (ACSILs) have continually participated in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues with repeated calls for increased visibility and agency in the Japanese government as well as official recognition of indigenous status on the archipelago, of which, as of May 2026, has yet to be granted.

Okinawan American, and my distant relatives are living in Hawaii and the west coast of the U.S."[53] Teruya became aware of this familial history as an adult in the United States. This history remains largely distant, prompting him to reactivate their migration experience through his work, and the movement of *Earn lots of money* in the global market. In this way, Teruya's migrating body functions as a site where memory is not only recalled but also re-embodied under new spatial and political conditions.

Since his move away from Okinawa, Teruya has been maintaining a kind of nomadic life, frequently traveling between New York, Berlin, and Okinawa. In his practice, however, Teruya continually focuses on Okinawan topics. His transnational mobility is a privilege afforded to the post-Reversion generation since birth as "Japanese," critically differentiating Teruya from his grandparents or even parents. Yet, for Teruya, his "Japaneseness" is not what tethers him to his identity, but the Okinawan indigeneity he explores and cultivates through his artworks.

In the present decolonial turn, the concept of migration extends beyond Teruya's personal trajectory to encompass the global circulation of his artworks, which have entered institutional collections across markedly divergent geopolitical contexts. Chapter One introduced two iterations of *結い, YOU-I*: the 2002 version, held by OkiMu, and the 2022 version, acquired by the British Museum. The two versions of *YOU-I* are nearly identical with one key difference. Compared to the OkiMu's 2002 version of *YOU-I,* which was made of hemp, the British Museum's 2022 version is made of banana fiber, the traditional material for *bingata.* Created two decades apart, this material difference, in part, can be attributed to limited resources available to

[53] Teruya, *Okinawa Heavy Pop*, 126.

the artist.[54] In 2002, Teruya was still early enough in his career that he could not afford a textile made of banana fiber.

The banana fiber plant is generally believed to originate from Southeast Asian countries, signaling the Ryūkyū Kingdom's past trade relationships prior to Japanese occupation.[55] Banana fiber weaving is a practice deeply rooted in the period of Ryūkyū sovereignty. However, two years after the reversion of Okinawa in 1974, the Traditional Culture Section (*Dentō bunka-ka*, 伝統文化課) of the Japanese national government recognized *bashōfu* (banana fiber cloth) from the coastal village of Kijoka 喜如嘉, and since then, featured frequently in Japanese craft exhibitions, as one of Japan's Important Intangible Cultural Properties.[56] Historically *bashōfu* was used across Ryūkyū social strata with varying degrees of banana fiber content, clothing patterns, and woven or dyed design, but very few examples of commoner clothing remain.[57] In the contemporary moment, *bashōfu* continues to be an exclusive and popular product on the Japanese mainland. In 2000, the price of one bolt of banana fiber cloth could increase four times the producer price and exceed one million yen.[58]

Linen, on the other hand, is not historically Okinawa-native material, but simply a material Teruya could readily afford and serves as the canvas for his artwork just as well. Teruya adorns his robes with same set of motifs regardless of whether the robe is woven using linen or banana fiber, and his political message remains identical. The difference in material, thus,

[54] Sayuri Ōshiro 大城さゆり, Personal Interview, September 9, 2025.
[55] Katrien Hendrickx, *The Origins of Banana-Fibre Cloth in the Ryūkyūs, Japan*, (Leuven University Press, 2008), 157.
[56] Hendrickx, *The Origins of Banana-Fibre Cloth in the Ryūkyūs, Japan*, 205.
[57] Hendrickx, *The Origins of Banana-Fibre Cloth in the Ryūkyūs, Japan*, 213.
[58] Hendrickx, *The Origins of Banana-Fibre Cloth in the Ryūkyūs, Japan*, 210.

becomes about what "authentic" and "tradition" means against the backdrop of everchanging post-colonial landscape.

The purchase of Teruya's 2022 *YOU-I* was made possible by the acquisition funds provided by Japan Tobacco International, or JTI.[59] Given Okinawa's long (and problematic) ties to the tobacco plantation, one is tempted to assume that the purchase of Teruya's work somehow followed JTI's directive.[60] Yet, the 2022 contract between the British Museum and JTI stipulated that funds would be treated as unrestricted, meaning there were no directives regarding the selection of artworks through the JTI Acquisition Fund. Instead, the driving incentive behind the museum's purchase of 2022 *YOU-I* were their acquisition priorities, emphasizing its commitment to promoting diverse representation in the collection, particularly in contemporary acquisitions. Following in this general directive, the Japanese Section singled out works by indigenous Japanese or LGBTQ+ communities as examples of purchases that would enhance diverse representation within its collection.[61]

The present circulation of *bashōfu* replicates a type of colonial trade dynamic where the community that produced a raw material cannot afford the very material they produced. It is unclear if Teruya's decision to create *YOU-I* using *bashōfu* once he could afford it meant the choice of material was already part of his conception for this series from the start. Regardless, based on the museum's own policy, the British Museum's decision to acquire the 2022 version

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[59] Geraldine Kendall Adams, "British Museum Dropped Tobacco Sponsor after Query from Department for Health," *Museums Association*, November 18, 2025. https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2025/11/british-museum-dropped-tobacco-sponsor-after-civil-servant-queried-deal/.

[60] Japan Tobacco has a long purchasing history with Okinawa, who is the largest producer per capita crop area. According to their website, their products account for approximately 60% of the Japanese cigarettes market.

[61] British Museum, "The JTI Acquisition Fund," Freedom of Information disclosure, reference no. 26043, April 24, 2026, PDF.

among multiple nearly identical robes from this series, has little to do with Teruya's artistic conceptions. Naturally, as a contemporary artwork, the 2022 version of *YOU-I* is no closer to *bingata* robes produced for the Ryūkyū royalty than any other versions in the series. However, being crafted from a material now widely recognized as central to Ryūkyū's "traditional" textile weaving undeniably adds a layer of indigeneity to the 2022 *YOU-I*. The robe is no longer just a canvas for Teruya's artistic statement, but itself an Okinawan "native," woven out of banana plants grown on the islands, and produced by the hands of Okinawan weavers. Whereas OkiMu acquired Teruya's work as "contemporary art," the British Museum obtained it as "Okinawan" or "indigenous" art. While the museum's impetus to purchase Teruya's work unquestionably comes from a place of good, their choice of the 2022 *YOU-I* betrays awkward imperialist expectations about the "indigenous" body and what indigeneity means. Teruya is an Okinawa native, but his body has long migrated out of the islands. The underlying message (though most likely inadvertent) behind the British Museum's purchase is that Teruya's Okinawan voice is no longer indigenous enough for the purpose of the museum without the support of the powerful tethering to the islands' soil and its local artisanal hands through the very material of the robe.

However, if the British Museum's choice of *YOU-I* 2022 was at all affected by its use of *bashōfu*, the purchase not only misses a significant message of this work but also comes dangerously close to making a mistake of oversimplifying the pluriversal experiences and memories within the same indigenous community. Even if he eventually incorporated *bashōfu*, it is clear Teruya did not think the use of a local material defined, or significantly changed, the political message of *YOU-I*. By not being fixated on the material, Teruya subverted the established material hierarchies and challenged Japanese government's authority to decide what "important," and "cultural," "properties" of Japan are. To be clear, Teruya sees great importance

in maintaining authenticity of his political voice through his continued relationship and active collaboration with practicing *bingata* artisans and workshops. His showcasing of Okinawan local skills aligns with the historical discourse on the authenticity of *bingata*, which ultimately placed a potent emphasis on the importance of place in the tradition where inherited knowledge and living tradition is more crucial than technology and materials.[62] Despite "non-traditional" material, the authenticity of the *bingata* technique ensures the poignancy storytelling and symbolic power of *YOU-I*.

Symbolically, whether to place the locus of indigeneity in *bingata*, a technique of decorating textile, or on *bashōfu*, a material to create textile, makes a critical difference. *Bingata* as a dying technique that uses colors instantaneously recognizable as Okinawa's own has the power to transform (indigenize) any surfaces as Okinawan statement.[63] On the other hand, textile materials, like *bashōfu*, that can be dyed or woven into any patterns arguably have the opposite property. The infinite image-making potential of *bingata* also leaves room to express plurality of experiences and memories. In this context, authenticity becomes a contested concept. The British Museum's acquisition emphasizes material continuity with tradition, whereas the earlier version held by OkiMu highlights the artist's adaptive practice under constraint, thereby complicating any straightforward notion of authenticity. For Teruya, the use or revival of *bashōfu* can be understood within the context of the post-Reversion generation's engagement with Okinawan postmemory as a means of affirming indigeneity. The British Museum, in effect, reinterpreted or

[63] Since 2002, Teruya has released other *bingata* pieces such as his *Heroes* (2009-2011) series which feature Okinawan, Japanese, and American cultural icons such as Ultraman, pop singer Namie Amuro, and Barack Obama.

possibly misidentified this process of cultural exploration as authentically "traditional" and "indigenous."

Teruya and his art's migratory trajectory operate as a critical modality for articulating and rendering visible his subject position as an Okinawan, particularly within the fraught political landscape of Japanese national belonging. Rather than alienating himself from his origins, Teruya's robes were a persistent act of return, where his experience of migration and artistic practice intensified and reconfigured his affective and political ties to Okinawa.

He demonstrates how post-Reversion Okinawans, residing in a post-migration era, maintain their identities through engagement with material objects such as textiles and personal testimonies. As *結い, YOU-I* traversed institutional, geographic, and interpretive contexts, it underwent repeated processes of reactivation, in which meanings are not merely translated but re-embodied within new viewing conditions. Each site of reception reconfigures the work's affective resonance, enabling histories to be experienced differently according to specific cultural and political interpretive frameworks. The artwork, therefore, retains the capacity to generate and redistribute affect across time and space.

Sakata Kiyoko: Avoiding the Center in the Center-Periphery

While Teruya's migration to Tokyo, then overseas, exposed a land-grounded bias in the contemporary discourse on indigenous identity, Sakata's move to Okinawa generates a distinct encounter with the internal peripheries of the Japanese state. Sakata moved from Niigata and has lived in Okinawa for over 25 years; she carefully avoids asserting an Okinawan subjectivity. By doing so, Sakata carves out a space and state of liminality for herself, successfully averting the

notion of the "center," all the while affixing her physical body to a contested periphery. From a place of neither here nor there, Sakata questions the very notion of center-periphery.

Sakata's creative projection of Kim Si-Jong's poem, *Song of Gangi* 雁木のうた, into *About Opposite Shores* (fig. 8) is emblematic of postmemory structures of transmission where the plurality of the memories transmitted is matched by equally diverse experiences the receivers bring as their memory receptacles. In *About Opposite Shores*, Sakata accesses Kim Jiso's historical trauma indirectly, using her own experience growing up in Niigata as a receptacle. Through Sakta-as-Niigata, Okinawa's regional memory is synchronized with Kim's recounting of Zainichi experience, which in turn creates a circuit of peripheral bodies, displacing metropolises that Japan considers the centers of politics, culture, and commerce.

Yet, Sakata's engagement with *Song of Gangi* also challenges the very notion of a stable center. The poem is situated within a broader textual engagement with *Niigata 新潟*, which foregrounds Niigata as a central site of entangled histories between Korea and Japan. While Niigata may appear as a peripheral from the political capital of Tokyo, being located at the mouths of Japan's two largest rivers, Shinano and Agano, made this region a key port since the antiquities. During the Meiji period, Niigata was also a main landing or departing site for immigrants given the Tokyo-Niigata-North Korea-Shinkyō (present-day Changchun) route which is the shortest path to the Asian continent.[64] Notably, the 38th parallel, a geopolitical division between North and South Korea, is poetically reimagined as extending and intersecting with Niigata, Japan. Between 1959 and 1984, 93,340 people—predominantly ethnic Koreans with Japanese and Chinese spouses—voluntarily participated in a state-facilitated migration from

[64] Kozo Hirono, "History and Culture of Port City Niigata," *Sekiyu Gijutsu Kyokaishi* 83, no. 4 (2018): 253, https://doi.org/10.3720/japt.83.251.

Niigata Harbor to North Korea.[65] Niigata is thus a hub with layered historical and political resonances and transnational complexities. By its nature, it was a center of a centrifugal force (moving people out), rather than that of a centripetal one (drawing people in). This concept of Niigata as a center informs both the poem and Sakata's artistic contextualization.

Sakata opened her exhibition of *About Opposite Shores* in Okinawa, highlighting intersections and relationalities among Okinawa, Niigata, and Korea. Through the use of narration, oceanic materials, and video modality as artistic strategy, Sakata further complicates Kim's explorations of militarization, language, translation, and imposed borders.

「雁木のうた」 reads:

> Do not decide/that what meets the eye/a street/is a road./Nor should we call/a path/made by being trampled,/unnoticed by anyone,/a road./Let us imagine/a bridge/cast over the sea./Let us think of/a tunnel/piercing the depths of the earth./Where will and intention/interlock,/in the Mach space/of a rocket/that links even the heavenly bodies,/let us raise/a road./Only in history/firmly assembled/from the sum/of human dignity/and wisdom/let us clear/our road./We must pass/through there.[66]

> 目に映る／通りを／道と／決めてはならない。／誰知らず／
>
> 踏まれてできた／筋を／道と／呼ぶべきではない。／海にか

[65] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Exodus to North Korea: Shadows from Japan's Cold War,* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 24.

[66] 呉世宗, "金時鐘『長編詩集新潟』と「日本語への報復」の関係―変身と道、可視化する「声」たち," *一橋論叢* 134, no. 3 (September 2005): 394–415.

かる／橋を／想像しよう。／地底をつらぬく／坑道を／考えよう。／意志と意思とが／かみ合い／天体をもつなぐ／ロケットの／マッハの空間に／道を／上げよう。／人間の尊厳と／智恵の和が／がっちり組みこまれた／歴史にだけ／ぼくらの道は／あけておこう。／そこを通らねばならない。

The primary theme of Kim's poem is the concept of a path (道), which, though devoid of explicit military references, is nevertheless imbued with allusions to militarization and occupation. In the opening lines, Kim simultaneously commands and destabilizes conventional perceptions of the path, by pointing out to what a path is not. This rhetorical strategy posits issues of intentionality and agency, implicitly questioning the forces responsible for "unnoticed" paths. Literary scholar Asami Yōko 浅見洋子 situates this reading within the broader context of Korean militarization, suggesting that the false roads Kim references are the byproducts of pervasive military personnel and infrastructure, providing the image of military boots trampling down a new path.[67] In rejecting these forms, Kim invites readers to envision alternative pathways—routes forged by individual agency and intentionality. Through his deployment of various motifs such as a bridge over the ocean and a tunnel through the earth, Kim generates new topographies of possibility, one where Koreans can carve their own path without colonial violence. This imaginative configuration is then reflected in Sakata's *About Opposite Shores,* wherein the artist constructs a symbolic bridge between Niigata and Korea by splicing video footage of their respective

[67] Yōko, Asami, "金時鐘『長篇詩集　新潟』注釈の試み" 論潮 *Ronchō* 1 (2008): 81, https://doi.org/10.60224/ronchou.1.0_119.

beaches. These ocean views are devoid of visual cultural markers. By linking these vantage points, Sakata offers the viewer a temporal perspective which simultaneously inhabits both shores, without knowing which one is which. Here, through the perspective of facing the ocean, Sakata strays away from centering prefectures or metropoles and even land itself, metaphorizing the dynamic qualities of the center with the ocean and with language. The placement of salt blocks over each character functions as a similar device, evoking the materiality of steppingstones and actualizing the conceptual path as an embodied and transgressive passage. Sakata further establishes connections between Korea and Japan through linguistic play. Kim wrote the majority of his poetry in Japanese, which was a deliberate and politically motivated choice.

In a 1971 dialogue with Shōtarō Yasuoka 安岡章太郎 and Kim Tal-su 金達寿, Kim Si-Jong made the following statement:

> As the most significant manifestation of my damaged selfhood, there is the Japanese language I was forced to adopt over my mother tongue. To master and wield this Japanese is, in a sense, the greatest revenge against the Japanese language—and perhaps even against the Japanese people themselves. My revenge against Japan is something that can only be engineered through the Japanese language.[68]

> 僕の損傷させられた僕の人格の最たるものとして、僕は自分の国語を押しやった日本語があるわけであって、その日本語を僕が駆使するということは、日本語に

[68] Ibid.

対する最大の復讐だと、いわば日本人に対する復讐でもあろうと思うのです。僕の日本に対する復讐というのは、日本語でしか形成しえないものを持っている。

Korea, in a similar manner to Okinawa, was subjected to coercive assimilationist policies during Japanese colonial rule, wherein language functioned as a principal instrument of imperial domination. Kim's continued use of the Japanese language constitutes a strategic act of linguistic appropriation and in doing so, rearticulates his agency within the context of colonial imposition. It is only much later that his works are published in Korean. Kim's intentional linguistic decisions reject the passivity of Korean subjectivity to the Japanese influence. Thus, in the context of language, the fixity of the center-periphery model is once again destabilized through the fluid and relational qualities of the authorial center.

Sakata takes another route to subvert the succession of hegemonies. She uses both Japanese original and Korean translations of the poem to further destabilize the embedded linguistic hierarchies between the two languages, subverting the historical asymmetries within language policies. *About Opposite Shores* is narrated by Sakata. Departing from conventional reading practices, the narrators each speak one character at a time, frequently alternating and occasionally overlapping. After each recitation, a salt block is placed over the corresponding character. Audibly, the pauses between characters and the polyphonic delivery obscure comprehension. Listeners may become absorbed in the interplay of both languages and lose track of previous content. The addition of salt further complicates engagement by obstructing the text from view. Through these methods, Sakata directs the audience's attention and controls the pacing.

Translation also destabilizes the expectation of true comprehension and communication. Japanese and Korean—though intimately intertwined—each have their own respective historical legacies. These microscopic shifts in meaning mirror the ways in which the Zainichi condition itself is not fixed. This bilingual presentation rejects Japanese as the central order. Sakata is very much in line with the sentiments in Kim's opening lines, refusing inherited routes of meaning, by transforming the sonic quality and appearance of language.

Sakata's curiosity and desire to understand is not neutral. Her move to Okinawa was motivated not by institutional mandate or metropolitan ambition, but by intellectual curiosity and a commitment to understanding Okinawan and Zainichi histories in greater depth. Just as her interest in Okinawa began when she discovered a song, her fascination with Kim Si-Jong emerged after encountering his poetry collection, *Niigata 新潟.* However, curiosity itself is shaped by unequal structures of mobility and belonging. While her movement does not reproduce the logic of imperial extraction, it nevertheless facilitates an encounter between dominant national identity and a region characterized by historical subordination. Thus, her practice may be interpreted not as appropriation, but as an effort to inhabit and critically interrogate the fractures within the Japanese nation-state. By leaving the plurality of voices in twin presentation of Japan/Japanese and Korea/Korean, Sakata is preserving the pluriversal nature of trauma experiences and memories. Through engagement with Okinawan and Zainichi histories, Sakata's fluid state of being evades pinning her exactly within the center or periphery.

Sakata occupies three intersecting positions: her hometown of Niigata serves as a crucial site for North Korean repatriation; Niigata itself maintains a marginal status relative to the rest of Japan; and Sakata, as a Japanese individual, is embedded within a broader system of domination that governed both countries. In her engagement with the topic of Korea and the Zainichi

diaspora, she also problematizes the location of the center, blurring boundaries and obscuring perspectives. Mobility, therefore, functions asymmetrically: for Okinawans, it reveals ongoing structural marginalization, whereas for Sakata, it exposes and interrogates the colonial privileges. Although Sakata resides in Okinawa, she remains within a Japanese prefecture, using Japanese currency and language. Nevertheless, remnants of the former Ryūkyū Kingdom persist, despite her lack of direct connection to it. This is evident in Okinawan activist movements opposing military bases as well as their efforts to preserve Ryūkyū heritage sites and language. Sakata navigates relationships with Korea, now a foreign country but formerly part of Japan, and with Okinawa, currently part of Japan but once a foreign territory. Her curiosity about both experiences enables her to balance multiple positionalities, which shift depending on the topics she engages with. This process is not unidirectional; she uses the Zainichi experience to understand Okinawa and vice versa. Sakata's engagement with the Zainichi experience is not simply a recollection of colonized histories, but rather an imaginative projection of these two colonial experiences to make sense of both.

Conclusion

Okinawan indigeneity is deeply embedded within the island's evolving geopolitical context. Patterns of migration—including both the emigration of Okinawans and the influx of mainland Japanese—do not threaten Okinawan indigenous identity; rather, they illuminate persistent power differentials between colonized Okinawa and imperial Japan. The transnational movements of figures such as Teruya Yūken, whose relocations to Tokyo, New York, and Berlin exemplify strategic mobilities, underscore the role of international recognition in critiquing and applying pressure to the Japanese state. In emphasizing the pluriversality of the post-Reversion

generation, I position the experiences of all diasporas across temporal and contextual boundaries as valid to those of Okinawans born and residing in Okinawa.

Pluriversal memories expand Okinawan identity to encompass multiple perspectives and lived experiences, thereby resisting essentialization and stagnation. This inclusive framework enables non-Okinawan artists, such as Sakata, to explore, interpret, and contribute to Okinawa's history and cultural memory through their own affective interactions and lived realities. Within this context, migration serves as a site for negotiating Okinawan identity and advancing communal political objectives, as evidenced by the global visibility of Teruya's artistic interventions within institutions historically associated with colonial power, including those in Britain.

Conversely, Sakata Kiyoko's relocation from Niigata to Okinawa destabilizes reductive center–periphery binaries, instead foregrounding the fluidity of "center" itself—a dynamic reflected in the historical trajectories of Niigata port. Her engagement with the work of Zainichi poet Kim Si-Jong further complicates these intersections, bringing Okinawan, Niigata, and Korean experiences into productive dialogue and underscoring the shifting configurations of power. In these contexts, power is reconstituted through visual and aural experimentation with language.

A rigorous understanding of Okinawan identity demands sustained engagement with its political dimensions. These two individual case studies provide critical insight into the modalities through which the Okinawan diaspora negotiates and enacts political indigeneity in transnational and intra-Japanese contexts.

Chapter Three: Extracting and Unsettling the Indexical Photograph

Introduction

In addition to considering the migration of the body and artwork, it is also important to consider another form of movement: the circulation of prints and photography as well as the remnants of memory which they leave behind. Indexical artistic practices, which reference history through traces, materials, and absences rather than through representational narratives, cohere with the transference of memories among post-Reversion Okinawans. Using Joan Gibbons's indexical applications to art as well as Marianne Hirsch's postmemory scholarship, I examine Teruya Yūken's *It's about me/it's about you* (fig. 9) which feature real Okinawan newspapers with cut-out political messages, to analyze the indexicality of not just the newspaper itself but also the photography that is used in its publications. I also interpret Sakata Kiyoko's *Remain – Niigata, Okinawa* (fig. 11) which is a time-based piece that features hundreds of family portraits suspended in gelatin filled bowls to analyze the impact of intentional instability and manipulation of the indexical photograph on memory construction.

Photography and memory scholarship are aligned in their capacity to capture and preserve specific moments in time. According to Hirsch, the phenomenology of photography is essential to the conceptualization of postmemory.[69] Hirsch's focus on this demonstrates that postmemory functions through images which generate an illusion of immediacy, accessing memories and experiences through the visual instead of the verbal, allowing individuals to internalize mediated histories as personally remembered experiences. Teruya and Sakata's transformative engagement with the photographic medium—through excised texts and impermanent prints—provides a compelling example of how indexicality operates within

[69] Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 107.

newspapers and personal photographs as a medium for memory construction for the post-Reversion generation. In these instances, of extraction and destabilization, Teruya and Sakata present the most prominent examples of postmemory at play.

In my analysis, I also call back to Huyssen's ideas on "urban palimpsests" where within this context, landscapes shaped by militarization, restricted land use, and environmental transformation function less as subjects of documentation than as indexical sites that point to unresolved histories. In this sense, using the approach of postmemory and indexical memory art offers a more attuned framework for understanding how the various facets of Okinawan identity for post-Reversion people persist as lived experience gives way to mediated remembrance, particularly how Teruya and Sakata physically intervene on indexical material.

The Indexical Photograph in *It's about me/It's about you*

Postmemory relies on indexical forms such as photographs, recordings, and documents, which establish a material connection to the past that is already at least once removed from the actual event. When these archival materials appear in news outlet, they become further distanced from the immediate experience of the event itself through the mediation not only of the original individual who created the archived material, but again through the mind (and hands) of the reporter and editor who produced the story. Teruya uses the newspaper medium in *It's about me/It's about you* to address this layered material connection to the past in the newspaper medium, while himself further intervening on the process of memory transmission.

It's about me/It's about you utilizes the *Ryūkyū shimpō* newspaper as its primary medium. Each print features a real publication, reporting the 2012 Osprey protest in Ginowan city. The principal headline reads: "100,000 people protest against Osprey rejection, calling it

‘discrimination’”（*Osupurei kyohi jūman-nin “sabetsu” ni kōgi*,
オスプレイ拒否１０万人「差別」に抗議）. Teruya produced several iterations of these works. His artistic interventions are evident in his stencil cut outs, which feature two messages in multiple languages—the title of the piece, “It’s about me/It’s about you” and “There is truth bigger than politics.” By carving into the newspaper, Teruya created voids that alter its indexical quality in a manner that would not be achieved by simply overlaying the messages as an additive technique rather than subtractive. At first observation, the most prominent feature of this work is the cutout. The viewer is likely to notice the carved stencil message before examining the newspaper content in detail. Similar to *結い, YOU-I*, Teruya’s work encourages careful and attentive viewing.

Teruya’s intervention reflects his earlier use of visual deception. In his previous work, *YOU-I*, the piece initially appeared to be a traditional robe, but closer examination revealed military motifs, thereby requiring detailed observation. Similarly, in *It’s about me/It’s about you,* one may not notice the serious resonance of the articles without diligent attention. Additionally, we observe further reverberations of *YOU-I* in the title itself. The phrase *It’s about me/It’s about you* connect and separate two ideas with a forward slash, whereas *結い, YOU-I* was delineated with a comma. Teruya’s use of the slash not only reflects notions of solidarity but also acknowledges difference. This dichotomy is further reflected in his alternative statement, “the truth is bigger than geopolitics,” which, for the audience, can raise questions regarding the specific perspective of truth to which Teruya refers.

Hirsch states that a process of reduction, “allows for a counter-process in which additive meanings can be built through the viewer’s own memory, imagination and knowledge of social

and cultural history."[70] Hirsch's concept of an imaginative exercise enabled by subtraction is evident in the display of Teruya's piece. The cut-outs also leave a physical trace on the museum walls as the lights pass through the holes, creating shadows. These shadows reference both the newspaper as an object and Teruya as the artist who has intervened in this material. In their display, the newspapers were protected by a clear acrylic panel and suspended from the ceiling by a wire. Through this display method, the piece imposes a shadow upon the wall behind it, creating another layer of text that the audience can read (fig. 10). The shadows become a second work, casted by the first, the original *It's about me/it's about you* piece. Here, we can see a striking resemblance between postmemory structures and shadow, where post-Reversion generations only have the original experience's cast, living in the shadow of the actual event. The specific forms of the cut-out text, which are emphasized through the projected shadow of the words, resemble the transmitted absence and the formative losses experienced by the Okinawan community. Visitors could walk around and behind the artwork, introducing a physical interaction that not only facilitates close looking, but also creates a momentary relationship between the viewer and the artwork through movement. Teruya's messages are only legible at a particular angle, where interpretation is mapped through the viewer's navigation through space. Audiences are compelled to read around the voids created by Teruya, reconstructing the content and tone of the newspaper article through investigation and imagination.

Photography serves as an integral component of newspapers and, more broadly, journalism. Photographs function as direct traces of reality, employing signs to reference and

[70] Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 34.

anchor themselves to specific temporal and spatial contexts. Gibbons addresses the concept of photographic traces in her statement:

> The photographic process involves a ghostly transference of the real (the loss of corporeality) …so that the connection to the real is not just a transmutation assisted by certain mechanical and chemical processes, it is also alchemical, and, as Barthes would have it, astonishing and metaphysical.[71]

In this context, Gibbons introduces the opportunity to discuss Hirsch's concept of postmemory. The indexical nature of photography, due to its physical connection to a past reality, grants images an evidentiary authority that renders them particularly effective carriers of postmemory. The front cover image of the newspaper, occupying half of the page, depicts a large group of protesters holding red signs that state, "Osprey No!" accompanied by a crossed-out image of the aircraft. The image not only portrays Okinawans' ongoing problems with the overwhelming presence of the U.S. military but also the impressive action of the Okinawan locals and the grassroots movement of these protests.

Photographs do not simply document the past; they allow subsequent generations to imaginatively inhabit it. Furthermore, when considered through Huyssen's palimpsest framework, the newspaper documents ongoing protests in Okinawa and highlights the presence of military bases, which may conflict with the constructed image of a tropical paradise. The *Ryūkyū shimpō* serves as a site for the circulation of memory, where postmemory is constructed within the Okinawan community rather than imposed by the Japanese government. This process

[71] Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, 37.

resists colonial narratives that portray Okinawans as passive and subsumed within a Japanese monolith, instead highlighting their ongoing and active resistance.

The photograph featured on the newspaper's cover enhances the indexicality of the entire piece. This image is inherited by younger readers and future researchers who may explore the *Ryūkyū shimpō* archives, representing memory in progress. For individuals who did not attend the protest, the image enables them to "remember" the event as part of their own historical narrative. Postmemory underscores the persistence of the past in the present; the photograph does not merely document an event but actively produces a future memory in a context where protests are not uncommon. By linking contemporary protests to the historical trauma of colonization, displacement, and resistance, even when these are not visually depicted, the photograph fosters a sense of continuity. Furthermore, the affective function of postmemory is significant, as images from this protest transmit emotions such as grief, pride, and solidarity, which are tied to inherited experiences of Okinawan activism, even among those without direct involvement.

The photograph's indexicality not only preserves physical traces of the actual event, but its dissemination through *Ryūkyū shimpō* and *Okinawa Times*—major newspaper publishers with a combined circulation of 400,000—further amplifies these traces. The *Ryūkyū shimpō* newspaper serves as a public record of the protest march, symbolizing Okinawans' collective political action against ongoing anti-military base struggles. Coverage of the protest size and the Okinawans' massive movement against the Ospreys on the mainland was minimal in comparison to Okinawan news outlets, with coverage focusing mostly on smaller protests.[72]

[72] The U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Ginowan, Okinawa Prefecture," *The Asahi Shimbun*, September 27, 2012, http://www.asahi.com/special/futenma/SEB201209270005.html. This article, about a protest by 300 people, was published a few montsh after the large protest by Asahi Shimbun, one of Japan's largest mainland news outlets.

Teruya reactivates the protest photograph on the global stage of museums by retrieving it from the newspaper archive and republishing it through his artistic practice. Teruya's interventions, particularly his method of cutting, demonstrate how memories are constructed, edited, and reinterpreted over time. Through these actions, he connects past struggles to contemporary issues and illustrates how memory persists despite fragmentation, without requiring a complete or unified narrative. Additionally, as an art object, Teruya's work is preserved according to museum conservation standards and protocols, rather than traditional newspaper archival practices, thereby immortalizing the protest march within another institution of remembrance: the museum. Because postmemory structures of transmission operate through affective recollection, the emotional and visual resonances of *It's about me/It's about you* stimulate these practices more effectively than mere recall or the newspaper alone. This piece has been, and can continue to be, exhibited, reproduced in books, examined online, taught in museum educational programs, and reinterpreted through these channels. Each encounter with the work renews and reactivates its political memory. In this manner, Teruya enables future generations of Okinawans to engage with the mechanisms of postmemory transmission.

Destabilizing Indexicality in *Remain - Niigata, Okinawa*

The installation piece, *Remain - Niigata, Okinawa*, exemplifies Sakata's approach to Okinawa's past under the structures of postmemory transmission. Sakata's work engages less with public themes and instead focuses more on private or personal subject matter. Just as we saw in *About Opposite Shores* that was featured in the previous two chapters, temporality is a defining characteristic of Sakata's artistic practice, which extends beyond her time-based works. Rather than employing conventional film development techniques, *Remain* presents portraits and

landscape photographs from Niigata and Okinawa, printed on Japanese washi paper. The photos are then layered on food-grade gelatin and framed by about 500 white plates and bowls (fig. 12). These images are distributed throughout the museum floor. The plates are arranged in close proximity, leaving no space for viewers to step between them. This sense of intimacy is contrasted by a deliberate separation from the audience, who are granted only limited access to observe the images in detail. In contrast to Teruya's open display methods and 360-degree views, Sakata's works are presented with strict spatial control. The semi-liquid suspension of the photographs is highly unstable and susceptible to distortion and fading due to movement, exposure to light, and paper melting into the gelatin. These seemingly minute changes demand a viewer's keen attention. Here, Sakata's intervention is clear in not just the photographs themselves but also in the way in which these images are displayed and how the visitors' bodies should move around them. Sakata, in essence, controls the remembering, while leaving the process of becoming forgotten to chance.

The call for awareness echoes Teruya's work but rather than the illusion of image, it is facilitated by the temporality of photography. Sakata's use of photography echoes the claim made by Hirsch: "…photographs give rise to certain bodily acts of looking and certain conventions of seeing and understanding that we have come to take for granted but that shape and seemingly reembody, render material the past that we are seeking to understand and receive."[73] Over time, these images deteriorate, making it increasingly challenging to distinguish Niigata and Okinawa. As a result, Sakata's work offers visitors a distinct experience with each viewing. Much like memory, the photograph exists in flux. As Gibbons points out, **"**the index is

[73] Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 117.

constantly vulnerable to 'degeneration' and seldom exists in a pure form."[74] In the context of Hirsch's concept of postmemory, both photography and memory require imagination to address gaps resulting from incomplete information, an exponential problem across time. Postmemory concerns processes of reconstruction and transference over concerns of pure experiences.

Similar to Teruya, the title of Sakata's piece also possesses indexical significance. The Japanese term she employs is "残華" (remnants or remains of a flower) which refers to the cherry blossoms that are still in bloom at the end of spring. It conveys a sense of melancholy, having passed their peak but still remaining in bloom.[75] Cherry blossoms reach complete maturity after their peak bloom and quickly deteriorate in a matter of one to two weeks. "残花" captures the moment after this peak. For a Japanese viewer, the title indicates the piece's time-based quality, becoming aware of the images as already fading. This sense of melancholy is evident in Sakata's use of an unstable medium for the images. The audience becomes increasingly aware of loss as a real-life phenomenon. Similar to the cherry blossom, the images simultaneously present multiple temporal states, making the past peak quality, the current degree of degradation, and the anticipated future deterioration all visible. This process of degradation is not neutral. Traditional photographic conventions assume the artist maintains control over both the captured subject and its presentation. Sakata challenges this convention by employing unstable materiality. She positions herself within a display system where indexical authority is intentionally diminished. Furthermore, Sakata involves viewers in this process, as their movements and presence threaten to disturb or further degrade the image.

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[74] Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, 30.
[75] 角川書店編, *『合本俳句歳時記 第五版』* (東京: 株式会社 KADOKAWA, 2019). 春の終わりになっても咲いている桜のこと。盛りを過ぎて咲き残っている寂しさが漂う。

Within this conceptual framework, Sakata's images do not merely reference a past moment but rather evoke the negative image at its most pronounced and detail. Her photographs thus signify not only the past but also a sense of temporal delay. This is manifested in her time-based work through the enduring traces of images that attempt to reconcile with irretrievable details lost to light. In this context, melancholy functions not solely as an emotion but as an indicator of temporality itself. Sakata foregrounds the "after," a space where presence and loss coexist. The terminology used in this title is frequently encountered in poetic forms, subtly indicating Sakata's specific intentions for the piece. Employing words with deeper historical and layered meanings positions the title as an integral component of the work's overall meaning-making system, rather than serving merely as a label. This approach requires the viewer to engage actively in the viewing process, not only through physical interaction with the piece but also through its interpretation. Such a strategy further resists documentary clarity, paralleling her use of the unstable photograph.

Sakata's use of degrading photographs diminishes their indexicality, though it does not eliminate it entirely. Despite their deterioration, the images retain a connection to their original subjects, whether people or landscapes. Material instability introduces complexity rather than mere destruction. This dynamic underscores how meaning and memory are generated not only through initial exposure but also through the afterlife of the negative and its printed image. A photograph's indexicality extends beyond the captured moment; the material existence of the printed image, shaped by deterioration or conservation, can reinforce or augment its indexicality, further connecting it to the past as time progresses. Material decay intensifies this concept, as the image visibly ages and deteriorates. Consequently, photographs serve as records of both their

subjects and their own material histories. In this way, the photograph becomes evidence of both the original event and the gradual erosion of its trace.

In relation to postmemory, the deterioration of photographs renders the passage of time perceptible. Material instability further obstructs the viewer's access to subjectivity, emphasizing historical loss. Although printed photographs are often thought to outlast their subjects, they too possess a finite material lifespan. Thus, the survival of the printed image and its traces expose the limitations of photography in recreating or fully recalling the past. The visibility of loss generates an emotional response, particularly melancholy, as viewers recognize both the existence of a past moment and its inevitable material disappearance. This awareness compels viewers to imagine what is missing, relying on imaginative reconstruction. Such active engagement is fundamental to postmemory, reflecting the necessity for later generations to reconstruct histories they cannot directly experience.

For Sakata, remembering is affective. The sense of melancholy is intensified through the use of the personal archive. In contrast to Teruya's interventions on newspapers, Sakata utilizes private photographs, such as family portraits and landscapes, which typically do not circulate nationally or regionally. Consequently, the act of remembrance becomes more complex. The boundaries between personal and public archives may blur in the context of trauma, as family photographs can appear in newspapers to convey tragedy or depict war-torn landscapes. In these cases, material instability becomes especially significant, as photographs transition between these categories. Sakata's incorporation of personal imagery within a public exhibition in Okinawa underscores this oscillation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the indexical practices of Teruya Yūken and Sakata Kiyoko provide powerful frameworks for understanding how memory, identity, and history are negotiated in contemporary Okinawan art. By employing materials and techniques that foreground indexical traces, absences, and temporality, both artists challenge conventional narratives and invite viewers to actively engage in processes of remembrance and reconstruction. Teruya's engagement with public protest and mediated memory through newspaper interventions, and Sakata's focus on the personal and ephemeral nature of photographs, together demonstrate how postmemory and indexicality intersect to sustain and transform cultural identity across generations and geographies. Ultimately, their works exemplify how art, as both a material and conceptual practice, can mediate the complex interplay between presence and loss, enabling new forms of collective and personal memory to emerge.

CONCLUSION

This thesis, structured in three chapters, contends that Teruya Yūken and Sakata Kiyoko, as post-Reversion artists, engage in postmemory structures of transmission. Through critical interventions and activations of the *bingata* tradition, as well as the use of personal and public archival traces and language, these artists remember Okinawa through affective means and establish a living connection with the past.

By situating these artistic practices within broader discourses of cultural politics, this analysis bridged the rupture between the Okinawan past, particularly the period immediately following World War II, and the experiences of Okinawans born after these events. In doing so, it mediated the generational gap in lived experience and opened new avenues for scholarship on contemporary Okinawan subjectivities and their relationship to political agency. Problems of continuity, especially under conditions of shifting temporal and spatial affiliations, remain salient across multiple cultural contexts. The material explorations Teruya and Sakata undertake provide a valuable context for art historians to examine how identity is negotiated and reinforced.

The concept of Okinawan identity resists narrow definitions based solely on ethnicity and instead foregrounds its political dimensions. Although Teruya possesses strong ties to the physical island, including an Okinawan surname, multigenerational family heritage, and upbringing in Okinawa. This political identity invites Sakata, a non-Okinawan, with no biological ties to the islands, to engage with Okinawa's history and cultural memory. Through affective interactions and lived experience, Sakata meaningfully contributes to the ongoing discourse on Okinawan identity, demonstrating that cultural memory can be accessed and reimagined beyond ethnic or geographic boundaries.

Teruya and Sakata's artistic practices illuminate the multifaceted processes through which Okinawan identity is continually negotiated in the post-Reversion generation who are still living in the aftermath of colonial interventions, forced assimilation, and the ongoing presence of U.S. military power. Their respective engagements with indigeneity, migration, and memory intervenes critically in the discourse surrounding Okinawa's socio-political and cultural realities. By mobilizing diverse media and drawing upon both lived experience and historical consciousness, these artists challenge fixed notions of identity and instead foreground its precarity and dynamism within a contested landscape. Examining their work contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary Okinawan subjectivities and underscores the significance of art as a site for articulating and reimagining collective memory and political agency in the context of historical trauma and ongoing marginalization. Through these nuanced interrogations, Teruya and Sakata advance the discourse on identity formation, offering new frameworks for conceptualizing continuity, belonging, and agency within and beyond Okinawa.

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Figure 1. Teruya Yūken, *結い, YOU-I*, 2002, *bingata* dyed kimono, hemp, 169 x 148 cm. Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum, Naha, https://okimu.jp/art_museum/artists/1513656980/.



Figure 2. Figal, Gerald, "Between War and Tropics: Heritage Tourism in Postwar Okinawa," in *The Public Historian* (Santa Barbara: University of California Press, 2008), 95, fig. 5.



Figure 3. Teruya Yūken, *結い, YOU-I*, 2022. Bingata dyed kimono, banana leaf fiber (169.0 x 148.0 cm). Installation view, Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, London, 2023, https://dajf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/019_20221007_MG_5815-scaled.jpg.



Figure 4. Teruya Yūken, *Scarlet Birds, Crimson Sky*, 2010. Bingata dyed kimono, hemp. (39.0 x 1350 cm). Installation view, Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, London, 2023, https://dajf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/026_20221007_MG_5852-scaled.jpg.



Figure 5. Teruya Yūken, Alternative display method at Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum, November 28, 2023, digital photograph, Flickr, https://flic.kr/p/2pksDmx.

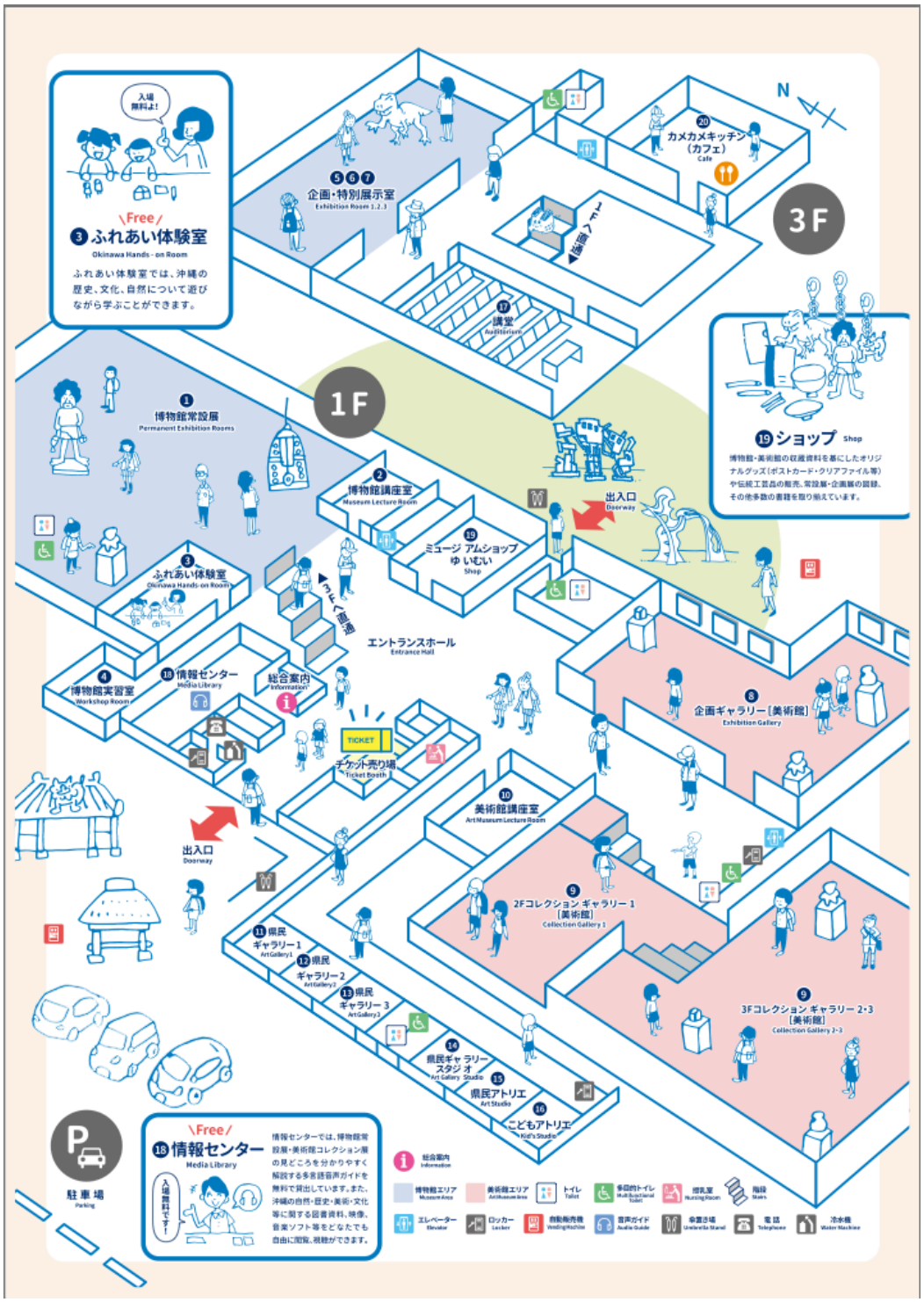


Figure 6. Museum map. From Floor Maps, by the Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum, n.d., PDF, https://okimu-jp-e.athp.transer.com/userfiles/files/floor_map.pdf.



Figure 7. Sakata Kiyoko, *About Opposite Shores*. Installation video, Sakyukan, Niigata, 2016, https://www.kiyokosakata.com/works/.

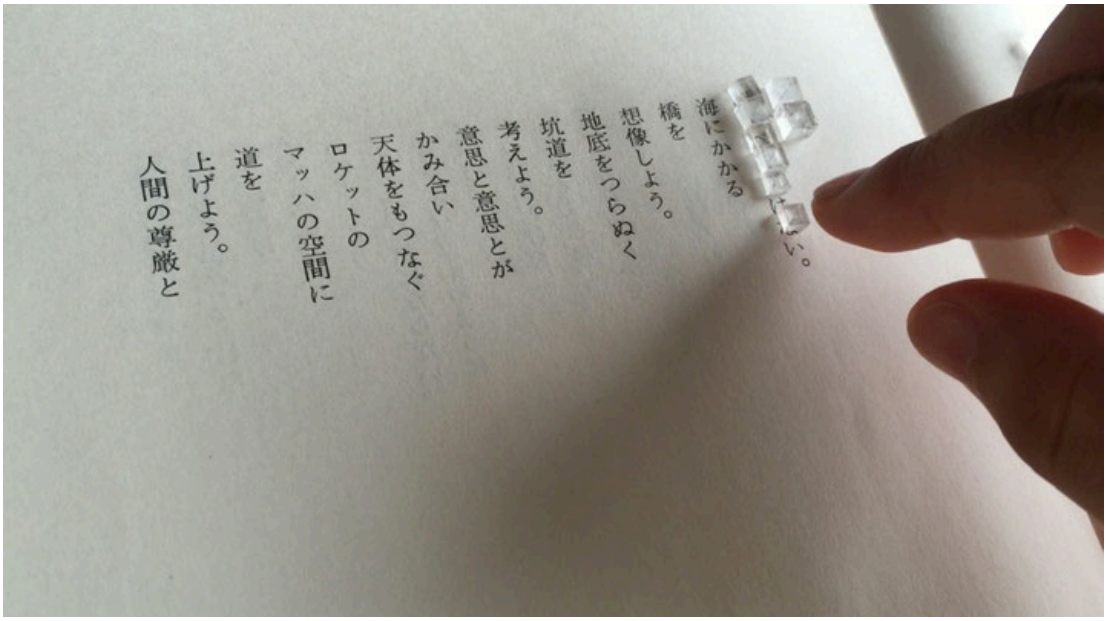


Figure 8. Detail of fig. 7.



Figure 9. Teruya Yūken, *It's about me/it's about you,* cut newspaper, 54.6 x 80 cm, 2012-2015, https://www.yukenteruyastudio.com/projects-1/its-about-me-its-about-you.html.



Figure 10. Detail of fig. 9.



Figure 11. Sakata Kiyoko, *Remain - Niigata, Okinawa*. Plate, photography, installation, Naha, 2002, https://www.kiyokosakata.com/works/.



Figure 12. Detail of fig. 11.

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